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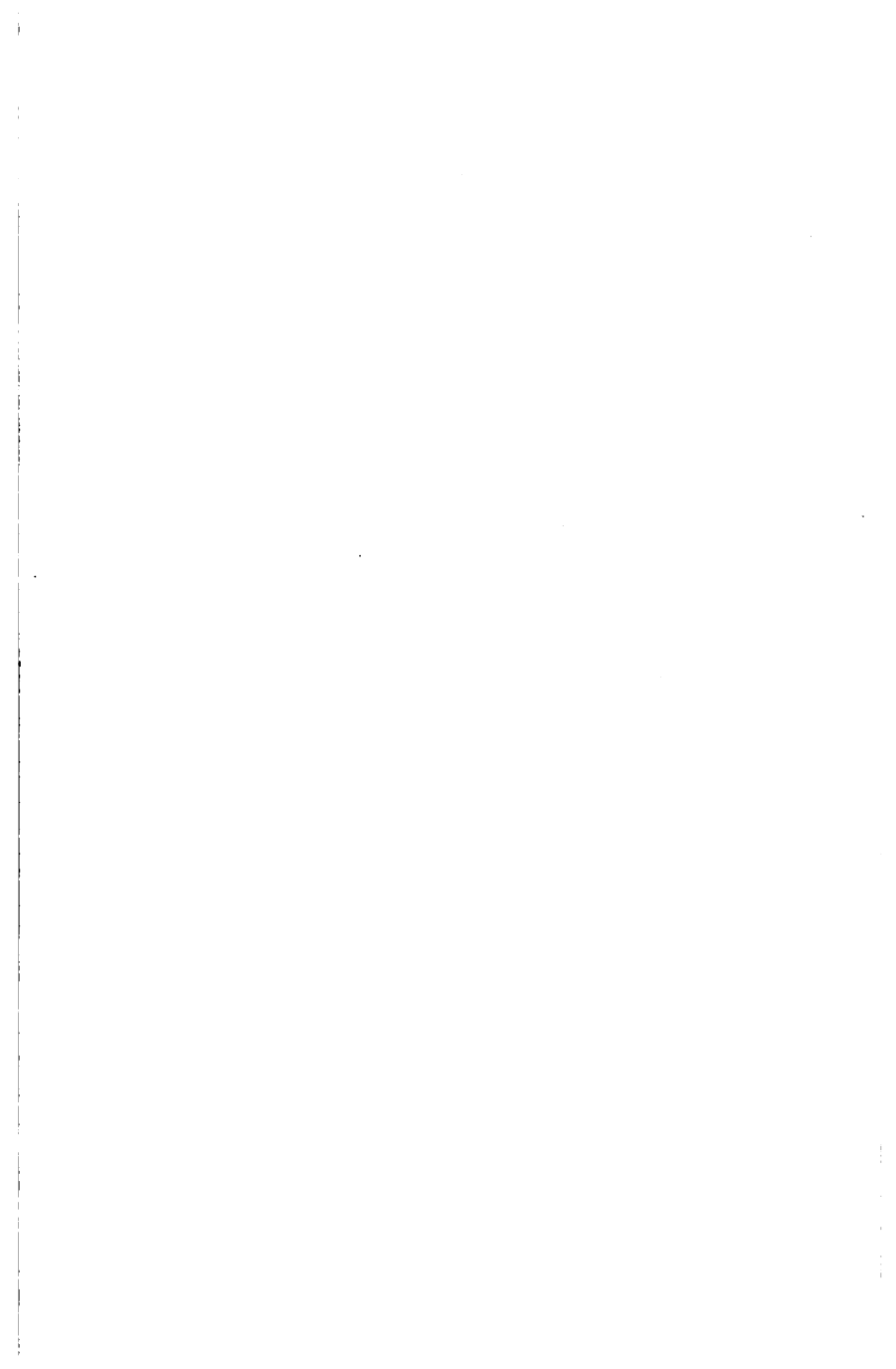
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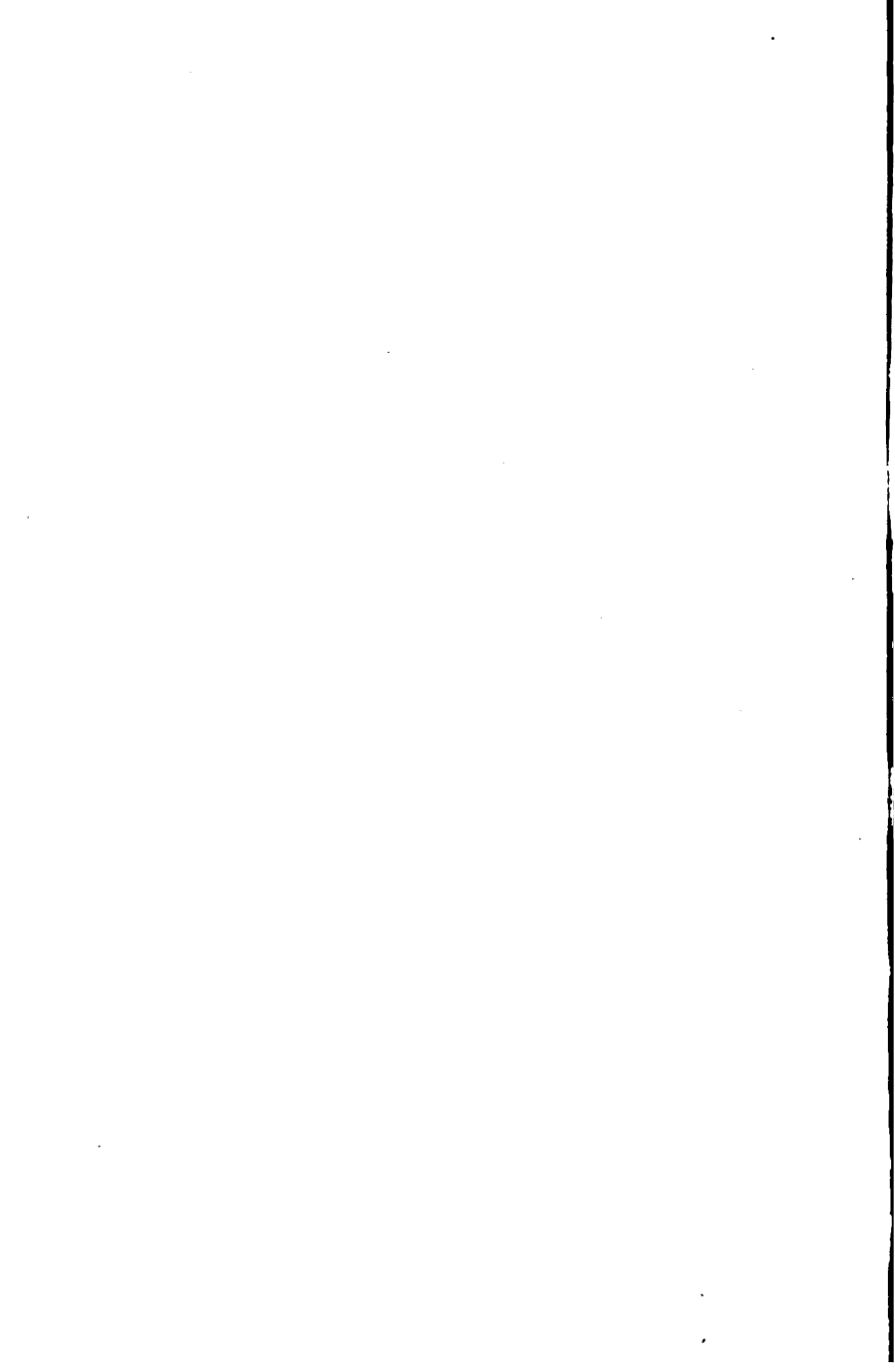


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THE LOVE MATCH

By ARNOLD BENNETT

NOVELS

MR. PROHACK	THE MATADOR OF THE FIVE TOWNS
THE ROLL-CALL	THE BOOK OF CARLOTTA
THE PRETTY LADY	BURIED ALIVE
THE LION'S SHARE	A GREAT MAN
THESE TWAIN	LEONORA
CLAYHANGER	WHOM GOD HATH JOINED
HILDA LESSWAYS	A MAN FROM THE NORTH
THE OLD WIVES' TALE	ANNA OF THE FIVE TOWNS
DENRY THE AUDACIOUS	THE GLIMPSE
THE OLD ADAM	THE CITY OF PLEASURE
HELEN WITH THE HIGH HAND	THE GRAND BABYLON HOTEL
THE GATES OF WRATH	HUGO

POCKET PHILOSOPHIES

SELF AND SELF-MANAGEMENT	HOW TO LIVE ON 24 HOURS A DAY
MARRIED LIFE	THE HUMAN MACHINE
FRIENDSHIP AND HAPPINESS	LITERARY TASTE
	MENTAL EFFICIENCY
THE AUTHOR'S CRAFT	

PLAYS

THE LOVE MATCH	THE GREAT ADVENTURE
BODY AND SOUL	CUPID AND COMMONSENSE
SACRED AND PROFANE LOVE	WHAT THE PUBLIC WANTS
JUDITH	POLITE FARCES
THE TITLE	THE HONEYMOON
IN COLLABORATION WITH EDWARD KNOBLOCK	
MILESTONES	

MISCELLANEOUS

OUR WOMEN	THE TRUTH ABOUT AN AUTHOR
BOOKS AND PERSONS	LIBERTY!
PARIS NIGHTS	OVER THERE: WAR SCENES

NEW YORK: GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

THE LOVE MATCH

A PLAY IN FIVE SCENES

BY

ARNOLD BENNETT

Author of "Clayhanger," "Body and Soul," "Sacred
and Profane Love," "Judith," "The Old
Wives' Tale," etc.



NEW

YORK

GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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THE LOVE MATCH. II

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

CHARACTERS AND SCENES

Characters

HUGH RUSS
ADRIAN DIBBLE
STRAKER
NINA
ANNE
ST. PANCRAS

Scenes

SCENE I

RUSS'S STUDY

SCENE II

THE SAME

SCENE III

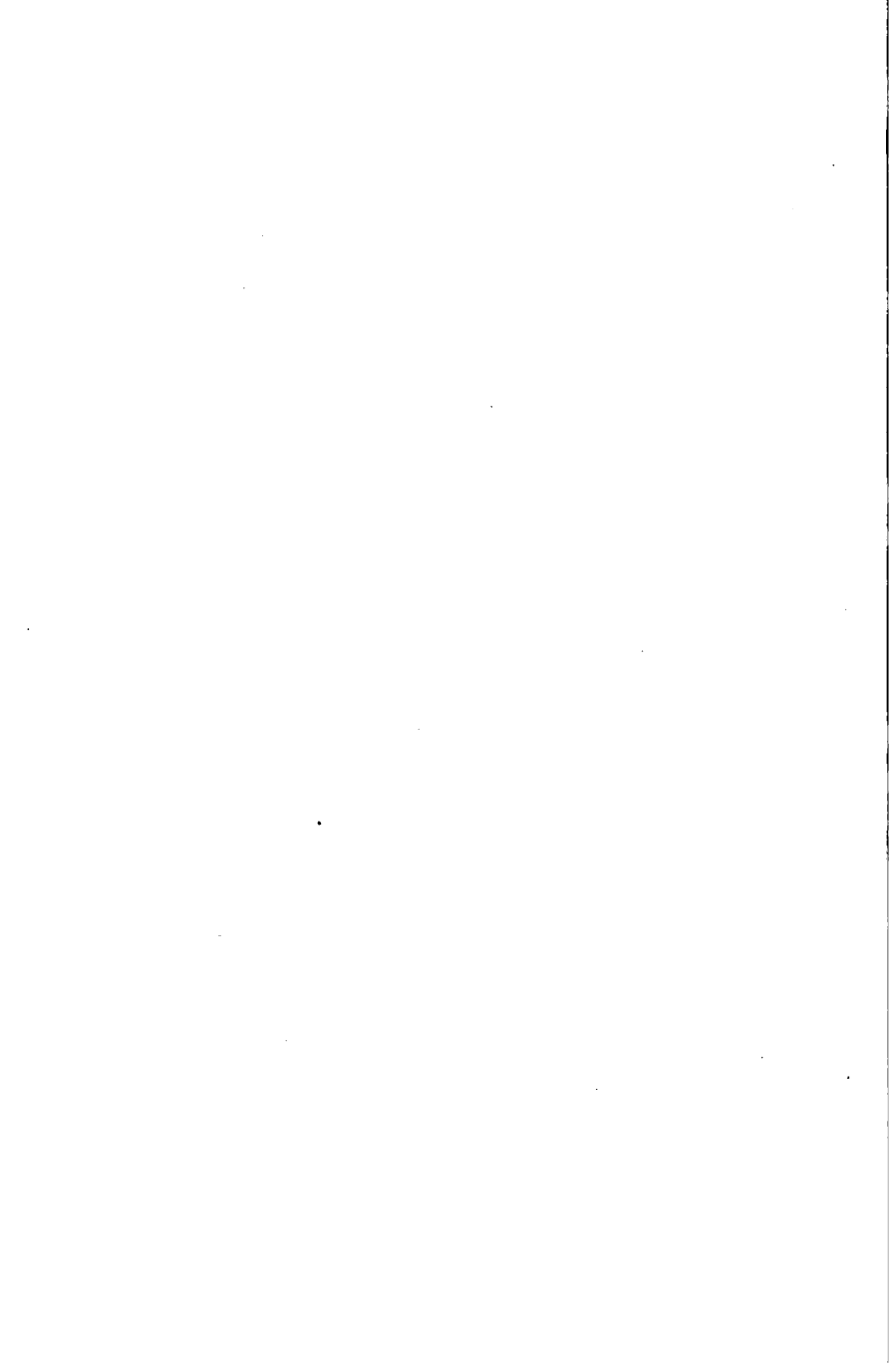
THE SAME

SCENE IV

ROOM IN CHOLMONDELEY COURT MANSIONS

SCENE V

RUSS'S STUDY



THE LOVE MATCH

SCENE I

Russ's study. Doors back [leading to the entrance hall], L. [up-stage, leading to the servants' quarters], L² [leading to drawing-room], R. [leading to bedroom].

A luxurious room. Among the furniture are a desk [with telephone, and a handsome bouquet of flowers wrapped in tissue-paper, on it] and a couch.

TIME: *After dinner.*

Nina is sitting alone. Enter Russ.

Russ [seeing Nina, with somewhat forced geniality and good humour]. Ah! So you are ornamenting my study.

Nina. You're late.

Russ. It's the first I've heard of it.

Nina. Look at your watch.

Russ [looking]. Well? Not a bad-looking watch.

Nina. You said you'd be back at nine.

Russ. Ah! Who did I say that to?

Nina. Straker. He's just told me.

Russ. I did tell Straker nine o'clock, but only to give him something to think about. I don't make appointments with servants. Their destiny in life is to wait. I fulfil their destiny. [*Opens a newspaper packet, glances at the newspaper, and drops it on the floor.*] I came across your bright sister at the restaurant.

Nina. Oh! Anne. Who was *she* with?

Russ. I don't know. Some fellow.

Nina. I suppose she was full of horse-sense, as usual.

Russ. She was. She kept me. We kept each other. It seems she's going to America to sell women's raiment for Sylvia, Limited.

Nina. America! I wonder what she'll do next, the little adventuress!

Russ [*calling out loudly*]. Straker! [*Straker enters at the same moment, L.*] Oh! There you are!

Straker [*impassively*]. Sorry I didn't hear you come in, sir. [*He takes Russ's hat, overcoat, stick, and gloves.*]

Russ. Any messages?

Straker. Miss Burton says she has finished copying the draft report of Heavy Oils Limited, sir, and is she to wait?

Russ. That's not a message. [*Straker with his disengaged hand picks up the newspaper and*

puts it carefully on a table; then he waits.] Tell her to wait till ten, in case; and she's to be here at nine, sharp, to-morrow.

Straker. Very good, sir.

Russ. Anything else?

Straker. Have you given any orders as to the car, sir?

Russ. That's not a message, either. [*Straker picks up the wrapper of the newspaper and drops it into the waste-paper basket, then waits.*] Shall I want the car?

Nina. Which car?

Russ. Which car, Straker?

Straker. I was referring to the one you've been using to-night, sir, the Daimler.

Russ. The Daimler. [*Nina shakes her head.*] No.

Straker. Very good, sir.

Russ. Anything else?

Straker. As to MacGregor, sir.

Russ. Who's MacGregor?

Straker. The new second chauffeur, sir.

Russ. Ah, yes. [*To Nina.*] He's reported to be the fastest driver in England. Killed five dogs, six fowls, and several profiteers, and never had his license endorsed. [*To Straker.*] What about MacGregor? A "message" from MacGregor?

Straker. He wished to know whether he should bring the new Lancia round in the morning.

Russ. Nine ten.

Straker. Very good, sir. [*He moves towards the door.*]

Russ. But, Straker——

Straker. Sir?

Russ. What the devil does MacGregor mean by sending messages to me direct? He isn't the head-chauffeur, and don't let him think it. Give the order to Wright.

Straker. That was my intention, sir.

Russ. And tell Wright I shan't want *him* at all to-morrow.

Straker. Very good, sir. [*Exit.*]

Nina. I suppose it's no part of your programme to kiss me.

Russ. Let me see now [*looking at his watch*]. Nine sixteen [*consulting appointment-block on desk, and then scribbling on it*]. Yes. That's all right. "Nine sixteen. Kiss Nina." [*He goes to her, bends down and kisses her. She clings to him a moment.*] It was delicious of you to think of popping in here.

Nina. I've been waiting thirty minutes.

Russ. That means three.

Nina. What do you mean—"That means three"?

Russ. I always divide by ten when you complain you've been kept waiting, and multiply by ten when you admit you've kept other people waiting.

Nina [*with a protesting pout*]. Oh! I'm the most punctual woman in London.

Russ. Yes. All women are [*he yawns*].

Nina. Here I've come to see you in your study and you're yawning!

Russ [*affecting to be shocked*]. Yawning? Vixen, can't you tell the difference between a yawn and a sigh of bliss, of rapture, of perfect ecstasy [*noticing the bouquet, and going to it*]? Oh! Now this is *very* nice. Very nice indeed [*blows her a kiss*]! I was just wondering——

Nina. They aren't from me.

Russ. Not from you? Then who are they from?

Nina. Some woman, I expect.

Russ [*taking the card from the bouquet*]. "With very best wishes from—Miss Peggy Partington, Regent Theatre." Agreeable little thing, Peggy!

Nina. She must be. But what's her excuse for sending you flowers?

Russ. Considering it's my birthday. . . .

Nina [*startled, but controlling herself*]. So it is.

Russ [*throwing some flowers out of a large glass on to the carpet, and putting the bouquet into the glass in their place*]. Yes, so it is. But that's not her reason.

Nina. What then?

Russ. Can't you guess? She's hoping I shall

back her next play to the tune of a few thousands.

Nina. And shall you?

Russ. I shall not.

Nina. Why not?

Russ. Because I'm a millionaire. [*Nina rings the bell. Russ watches her do so, but makes no comment.*] No! The flowers are pure profit—to me.

Nina. How did she know it was your birthday?

Russ. Ever heard of "Who's Who"?

[*Enter Straker, L.*]

[*He looks at Russ, and Russ looks at Nina.*]

Nina [*to Straker*]. Oh! Those flowers smell rather strong. Mr. Russ would like you to take them out.

Straker [*picking up flowers from the carpet*]. Yes, madam.

Nina. I meant those in the glass.

Straker. Yes, madam.

[*Exit with all the flowers.*]

Russ [*with calm and disdainful resentment*]. You're angry with me now.

Nina [*hurt*]. Indeed I'm not. Why should I be angry? Do you suppose I mind who sends you flowers?

Russ. No, I don't. That's not the reason. You're angry with me because you came in here to-night, after saying positively you wouldn't come, and I didn't happen to be waiting for you.

Nina. Hugh, you're ridiculous.

Russ. Of course I am. *That's* not the reason. You took me against my will to that footling hospital ball last night, and I only got three hours' sleep instead of six, and you're angry with me because I yawned after you kissed me.

Nina. You're too utterly absurd!

Russ. Of course I am. *That's* not the reason either. The real reason is—[*firmly*] You're angry with me because you clean forgot it was my birthday to-day. That's why you're angry with me.

Nina. Well, I think you might have reminded me.

Russ. I agree the fault was entirely mine.

Nina. Hugh, I can stand anything except your sarcasm.

Russ. Then let's clear the decks for one of our periodical shindies. Now! What next?

Nina. You think you're a very wonderful man.

Russ. I certainly do.

Nina. You began on the Manchester Stock Exchange, and Manchester wouldn't hold you. Then you went to Melbourne, and Melbourne wouldn't hold you. Now you're in the City of London, and the City can't hold you. And when you go to hell, hell won't hold you. Oh, yes, you're very wonderful.

Russ [*seizing her*]. You can hold me.

Nina [*in a moved, dreamy voice*]. Can I?

Russ. Yes, you can. And what's more, we *aren't* going to have one of our periodical shindies. Nina—I daresay I'm a bit miraculous, but, by God, you're an equal. If you hadn't been, do you think I should ever have looked at you?

Nina. I didn't exist till you looked at me.

Russ. I know.

Nina. But I'm nothing compared to you.

Russ [*lightly*]. No, nothing! A bit of fluff, to be *crushed*! [*She slips to the floor.*]

Nina [*still in a dreamy voice*]. Sit down, Hughie.

Russ [*sitting*]. But you——

Nina. I like sitting on the carpet. [*She reclines at his feet.*] I wonder *why* women nowadays are so fond of the floor.

Russ. Because they're oriental, of course.

Nina. But *I'm* not oriental, Hughie! [*Looking at him with loving passion.*] Am I?

Russ. That's the Eastern question.

Nina. But am I?

Russ. A bit.

Nina. But you like it, don't you?

Russ. Shall I tell you a secret?

Nina. Do.

Russ. Every man has a private longing to live in the East.

Nina. But not harems and things?

Russ. Well—within reason.

Nina. It's disgusting. But——

Russ. But what?

Nina. If I was a man I should certainly keep a harem.

Russ. I bet you would.

Nina. What do you mean?

Russ. God knows!

Nina. Hughie, I want you to tell me something. But don't be funny.

Russ. What do you mean—funny?

Nina. Well, don't say "God knows" in that funny tone.

Russ. All right.

Nina. But you promise? I'm not joking.

Russ [*companionably*]. All right.

Nina. What do you think of me? I'm always dying to know, and I'm never sure.

Russ. The whole truth?

Nina. Oh! Of course.

Russ [*aside*]. More or less. [*To Nina.*] What do *you* think of *me*?

Nina. I think you're magnificent and terrible and ruthless.

Russ [*with amicable sincerity*]. Oh, no, I'm not. But you are.

Nina. Not really. [*Russ nods.*] I don't mind being told I'm magnificent, and even terrible. It flatters me. But ruthless! You don't mean I'm ruthless.

Russ. I do.

Nina. But I'm the most yielding person. I'm never ruthless.

Russ [*amiable but persistent*]. Yes, you are.

Nina. How? When? When was I ruthless last?

Russ. You're always ruthless in your appetite for life. You want to taste everything, enjoy all the sensations there are. This evening you like intensely to sit very quiet on the floor; but last night you were mad about dancing and eating and drinking. You couldn't be still. To-morrow night it'll be something else. There's no end to what you want, and what you want tremendously, and what you've jolly well got to have. You aren't a woman. You're a hundred women.

Nina. Oh! Hughie. How well you understand!

Russ. Yes, don't I?

Nina. But what's all this got to do with being ruthless?

Russ. Well, as I say, when you've sniffed a sensation in the air, you've jolly well got to have it—all of it—at once if not sooner. You're ruthless till you're satisfied.

Nina [*tenderly*]. Do I make you very unhappy? Hughie, you mustn't tell me I make you unhappy. I couldn't bear it.

Russ. Then I won't.

Nina. But do I?

Russ. Let's say you cause a certain amount of disturbance sometimes.

Nina. But you like me to be as I am, don't you?

Russ. Yes.

Nina. You wouldn't have me altered?

Russ. Can't alter a climate.

Nina. But I'm not a climate. •

Russ. Yes, you are. You're my climate. Tropical.

Nina. Now you're being witty. And you swore you wouldn't. [*Sheds a few tears.*]

Russ [*caressingly*]. Come now, old climate. Can't have showers on a fine evening.

Nina. You don't know how much I want to be perfect for you.

Russ. But you are perfect for me. [*Bends and kisses her wet eyes.*]

Nina. Am I? Really? [*Russ nods.*] Really truly?

Russ. You know my ruthless rule, "The best is good enough; chuck everything else into the street." Have I ever, on any single occasion, chucked you into the street?

Nina. But I want to be more perfect.

Russ. Why do women always hanker after the impossible?

Nina [*scarcely listening to him*]. I want to help you. Somehow. I don't know how. I want to be useful to you. Seems to me I'm not a very

useful member of society. I just live and go on living, and that's all. You mayn't suspect it, but I often reflect on these things, and it worries me. Of course I organise charities; but——

Russ. "But," "but," "but"! If you want specially to please me, don't be morbid. Keep your eye on the practical point.

Nina. What is the practical point?

Russ. The practical point is that I can't do without you, whatever you are, and I have a sort of idea you can't do without me, whatever I am.

Nina. Oh, I can't!

Russ. Each of us controls the market and can exact terms. That's the point, and nothing else matters.

Nina. It's true. But I *do* want to be useful to you. I *would* like to be perfect for you.

Russ. "Useful" be damned. As for "perfection"—curse it. It isn't a bundle of perfections that I can't do without. It's *you*. People might say we're in love. I hate the word. It's been spoilt. The feeling that I have is far deeper, and more complicated, and more mysterious, and more awful—yes, awful—than anything that that silly word "love" means. I'm only just beginning to understand it—only just beginning. I used to laugh at it. Now I'm afraid of it.

Nina. Afraid of it?

Russ. Yes, because it's so wonderful. It's like a dark night in a forest. It's all round me. I

was standing in a desert, and the forest has grown up imperceptibly on every side of me, and I never noticed it growing. And it's got me. And I could have sworn nothing could ever get me. And I don't know what it is. I only know it makes everything else seem silly.

Nina. Hughie, how you understand! But you're glad?

Russ. "Glad" 's a poor word.

Nina [*after a silence; very softly*]. How beautiful an evening like this is! I could sit here for ever.

Russ. You're sitting in a very dangerous position.

Nina. Why?

Russ. Supposing some one come in [*comically*]? For instance, *Straker*?

Nina. Straker isn't human.

Russ. No, he's a god.

Nina [*comically*]. He wouldn't breathe a word.

Russ. But he'd *know*.

Nina. Know what?

Russ [*whispering*]. How we sit when we're alone. I tell you the position is highly exposed. [*The telephone bell rings loudly, and keeps on ringing. Nina springs up. After a few moments Russ hurries to the door, L., and opens it.*]

Russ [*savagely*]. Straker, why the hell don't you come and answer this telephone? [*To Nina*

calmly.] I let them connect me up after nine o'clock so that Miss Burton and the whole gang can be free. But only on the understanding that Straker answers the calls.

[Enter Straker, aggrieved but impassive. He takes up the telephone.]

Straker [into the telephone]. Yes, sir. . . . Pardon me, this is Mr. Hugh Russ's. . . . What name? The what? . . . The *what*? . . . No, sir, I am not. My eyesight is somewhat imperfect, but I have never heard that there is anything wrong with my hearing. . . . Oh, yes. I cannot say at the moment, but if you will oblige me by holding the line I will ascertain. Thank you, sir. *[To Russ.]* The Chancellor of the Exchequer's compliments, sir, and he would be greatly obliged if you could go and see him at his house at once. His secretary speaking.

Russ. At once?

Straker. Yes, sir.

Russ. What have you told him?

Straker. I have informed him that I am not deaf and asked him to hold the line while I find out whether you are in.

[Nina, moving as far away as possible from the telephone, makes negative signs to Russ, who follows her.]

Russ [in a low voice to Nina]. But, my dear girl, it must be rather urgent. The Chancellor of the Exchequer doesn't call up private citizens like

this in order to find out whether they prefer Little Tich to Harry Lauder.

Nina [*in a low voice*]. But our evening? We were so happy.

Russ. "Our evening!" "Our evening!" It's the Budget.

Nina [*vexed and cold*]. Oh! Do as you think best.

Russ [*to Straker, in an angry outburst*]. Tell the fellow to go to hell. [*Straker claps his hand hastily over the mouthpiece of the telephone.*]

Straker [*into the telephone*]. I regret to say that Mr. Russ is not in. No, he didn't leave word. We-ell, he might be at his office in the City. . . . I beg pardon. . . . City, eleven thirty. Double one three nought. . . . Yes, probably you will get him there. He often stays very late. . . . Not at all. . . . Thank you, sir. [*He places the receiver.*]

Russ [*quietly*]. Straker.

Straker. Yes, sir.

Russ [*grimly*]. See that I'm not disturbed again. I'm very busy.

Straker. Very good, sir. [*Exit.*]

Nina [*with affected lightness*]. What do you suppose he wanted?

Russ [*with affected lightness*]. I suppose he wanted my advice. I suppose he thought I was about the best man he could consult in the City. And I suppose that as I'm supposed to be able to persuade anybody of anything in finance I

might have injected some common-sense into him. An underwriter said to me to-day that I'd almost made him believe the multiplication-table was a myth. Ha!

Nina. But does the Chancellor of the Exchequer really want advice?

Russ. No. All he wants is money. And he's going the wrong way to get it. All finance ministers are the same. For three mad months in the spring they run after the goose with a hatchet like homicidal maniacs, until some fellow like myself stops 'em with the magic word.

Nina. What magic word?

Russ [*whispering*]. Eggs. [*In his ordinary tone.*] Then they come to themselves with a jerk, and pretend they were only meaning to *tickle* the goose with that hatchet. God knows what may happen to the devoted goose this year.

Nina. Hughie, you ought to have gone over to see him at once.

Russ. Of course I ought. [*Ominously.*] But you'd better shut up.

Nina. Why didn't you go?

Russ. I tell you, you'd better shut up.

Nina. But I implored you to act as you thought best.

Russ [*ignoring what she has said; very grimly*]. Yes, you're happy now. You need three things to make you really happy: to put me in the wrong, to show your power over me, and to satisfy the

desire of the moment. And you've got 'em all three at once. You wanted "our beautiful evening." Well, you shall have it. [*Angrily.*] Your sort are the most ruthless egotists that ever lived. You think of nothing but yourself. Even when I reminded you of my birthday it didn't occur to you to wish me many happy returns of the day. So long as you have your beautiful evening the country may go to the devil. It is true I could do anything with you if I chose always to flatter you. Look at just now. I tell you, you can hold me, and you're like wax. I offer a little mild criticism and you begin to cry. I tell you you're perfect, and you're all smiles. Then you indulge in artistic self-depreciation—all your sort love bathing voluptuously in self-depreciation—but only in order to extract the flattery that you're the one woman in the world. Flattery's your drug. But I'll see you damned before I give you any more of it. Flattery's right off.

Nina [*calmly*]. I'm glad. I always prefer the truth.

Russ [*with increasing emotion*]. Do you indeed! Well, you shall have it. The truth is that you're a waster, and all your sort are wasters, and the illustrated weeklies are full of wasters! You want everything, you butterflies do—every flower in the bally garden. Talk about the charities that you organise! Dope! Nothing but dope! I have to go to that ball of yours. I don't want to

go, but I damn well have to. I have to pay three hundred guineas for a box, and invite a lot of fools to giggle and guzzle in the box. I should much prefer to give three hundred guineas straight to the hospital. Then I shouldn't have missed my squash rackets this morning and muddled my day's work. But, oh, no! That wouldn't do. The ball has to succeed because your sort has organised it. It's not the hospital that counts with you, it's the ball. The ball does succeed. All the papers say rapturously to-day that the hospital has benefited by over five thousand pounds. But to get that five thousand fifteen thousand was spent in frocks and two thousand in drinks and three thousand in oddments. Why not have given the whole twenty-five thousand direct to the hospital? Why not? Because your sort are a pack of egotists and wasters, and never want to go to bed and never want to get up either. Hospital, by God! For you people the hospital is exactly the same thing as Ascot, and Henley, and tennis at Wimbledon, and the Russian ballet, and Christie's, and the opera, and the private view at the R.A., and the Military Tournament—yes, and a funeral in the Abbey and a lively divorce case. I said Oriental. By God, you've got to be Eastern and Western too. Nothing less'll satisfy you. As for this wonderful desire of yours for *helping* a fellow—! “Not a very *useful* member of Society?” I should say not. You give nothing,

nothing; but you're greedy for all pleasure—all of it!

Nina. And who made us? God? No fear! You and your sort made me and my sort. Didn't I say I didn't exist until you looked at me? Who taught us all we know? You did. And a mighty quick education, too, in my case! Who fed us on flattery until we can't live without it? Who insisted on us being expensive? Who offered us every pleasure and felt hurt if we didn't accept them all? Who made us understand that the more whims we had the better, and that our caprices were the most delightful thing in the world? You! You! You!

Russ. If I'm not interrupting you——

Nina. You are! I didn't interrupt you, and don't interrupt me. You aren't the only person who can tell the truth. Why did you do all this to us? To please *us*? I don't think. No! To please yourselves. To flatter us? Not a bit! To flatter yourselves. There's nothing on earth flatters you so much as to be able to keep a tame, dependent, living creature who's highly ornamental and perfectly useless. It's a proof how rich and powerful you are. It's an extension of your personality. And you don't really care for anything except your own bursting conceit of yourselves. You talk about what you call my appetite for the whole of life, but you exaggerate, my powerful friend. There are lots of things in life that you've

never offered me. Did you ever suggest taking me to the British Museum, for instance? No. The British Museum isn't in the movement. It might lead to something that wasn't perfectly useless and silly. And we've got to be useless, or we're no good to your pride. If we do try to combine the silly with the useful and organise a hospital ball, you at once become desperately sarcastic. You must know that the satisfaction of your manly pride means the undermining of our characters, because nobody, man or woman, can swallow flattery all day, and indulge whims all day, and run after pleasure day and night, without moral damage. It's bound to ruin any individuality.

Russ [*grimly admiring*]. It seems to have left yours pretty strong, anyway.

Nina. Yes, it has. And so you call me ruthless and greedy. You ought to thank heaven that, after your education, there are one or two of us that have escaped being absolute kittens.

Russ. I admit your education is unfinished. However, I'll finish it.

Nina. My education?

Russ. Yes.

Nina. You can't finish it. You're too late. It's finished.

Russ. We'll see.

Nina. What shall you do?

Russ. I'll show you you haven't kept your part of the bargain.

Nina. What bargain? I never heard of any bargain.

Russ. The implied bargain.

Nina. Tell me what you mean.

Russ. Not now.

Nina. Yes, now!

Russ [*firmly*]. I will not tell you now. We're neither of us in a state to argue sensibly. We should probably only squabble.

Nina [*dully*]. I don't care.

Russ. But I do. Contrary to the general opinion, women can never foresee danger. I realise, if you don't, that for us to squabble beyond a certain point might be very dangerous. Don't forget that you and I, Nina, are living on the edge of a volcano.

[*The door opens, and Adrian Dibble's voice is heard outside: "No, I won't take my overcoat off, thanks."*]

Russ [*startled; springing up*]. The volcano!

Nina [*greatly agitated; with a cry*]. Whatever shall I do?

Russ [*clasping her arm firmly, and regaining his calm*]. Steady yourself, and lie like the devil.

[*Enter Straker, back.*]

Straker. Mr. Adrian Dibble.

[*Enter Dibble, smoking a cigar.*] [*Exit Straker.*]

Dibble [*cheerfully*]. Ah! . . . The harmless, necessary husband.

Nina [*blandly*]. Then you did get my message, Adrian?

Dibble. What message, my love and my dove?

Nina. We've both of us been trying to get you at the theatre to tell you that I'd come round to Hugh's about the ball accounts, and wanted you to call for me.

Dibble. I never got any message. Did you 'phone to the front of the house?

Nina. We tried both lines, and I don't really believe we got either, did we, Hugh?

Russ. I doubt it.

Nina. But I sort of told *somebody*, at *some* theatre, to ask you to call here on your way home. The telephone is simply awful now in the evenings. And as for the King George Theatre, nobody ever seems to get it. How people book seats by 'phone at your beautiful playhouse I can't imagine.

Dibble. Oh! You can't! Well, neither can I. And the fact is, they don't. What do you think the house was to-night?

Nina. What?

Dibble. Sixty-three pounds, one shilling, and sevenpence.

Nina. Isn't it disgusting!

Russ. What are you going to do, Adrian?

Dibble. It isn't a question of what I'm going to do, it's what I've done. I've put the notice up

to-night. . . . Never mind! Fortune of war! What's this about those ball accounts, Nina?

Nina. Oh! I got all mixed up in them, and I was tired, and so [*lightly*], as Hugh is such a financier, I just had the idea of coming along here and asking him to straighten them out for me.

Dibble. You just had the idea, had you? Women are the most conscienceless creatures.

Nina. Why?

Dibble. You've no right to worry Hugh with such a thing. You should have asked me. Where are the accounts? Hand them over. I'll see to them.

Nina [*looking about before speaking*]. Oh, yes. You gave them to your secretary, didn't you, Hugh? She's gone, hasn't she?

Russ. Er—yes, she's gone. That's quite all right, Adrian. I'll have them in order in the morning. I'll send 'em round to Nina.

Dibble [*to Nina*]. Well, don't do it again. Now, look here, little girl, I'm sorry to say it, but you're in the way. I didn't come to see you. I came to see Hugh, alone. The car's outside. You'd better go to by-bye. The harmless necessary will take a taxi—if any. [*Nina makes a curtsey.*] Where are your things? Yes, I know. In the hall. I wondered whose cloak it was. [*He runs out.*]

Russ [*admiringly*]. Your lying is simply uncanny.

Nina. What can he want?

[Re-enter Dibble, with Nina's cloak and bag. Russ rings the bell.]

Nina. I must say——

Dibble. Step lively.

Russ. Good-night, dear lady. My rule is never to protect a wife against her husband. *[Enter Straker.]* Show Mrs. Dibble to her car.

[Exit Nina and Straker, back.]

Russ [at the spirit case]. Drink, Adrian?

Dibble [with a demeanour suddenly changed to complete depression]. Give me a double. Hugh, my lad, I've come here to ask a favour of you. I'm in Queer Street.

CURTAIN

SCENE II

Same as Scene I.

The next afternoon.

Russ, alone, is showing signs of scarcely-controlled impatience.

Enter Straker, back.

Straker. Mrs. Dibble.

[Enter Nina. Exit Straker.]

Russ. So you've come. *[His demeanour becomes normal.]*

Nina. Are we friends?

Russ. Certainly not. We're lovers. *[He kisses her rather hurriedly.]*

Nina. Hughie, I was wrong last night. Kiss me again.

Russ. On the contrary, you were quite right—as far as you went *[kisses her]*. You—emitted—a large quantity of the most damnable truth. I kept my temper wonderfully.

Nina. You've seen the Chancellor of the Exchequer?

Russ. I have not. Of course you were inexcusably wrong about the Chancellor. I telephoned

him dutifully this morning. But he seemed to have no use for me this morning. So the country no doubt went to pot during the night.

Nina. But my accounts?

Russ. Well, I haven't had them yet.

Nina. Oh no! Of course you haven't. I was thinking I'd left them here yesterday evening. How silly of me!

Russ. You told Adrian you'd brought them to me. It was a thumping lie; but you're such an accomplished and persuasive liar that apparently you can deceive even yourself. Adrian told you what he came about last night?

Nina. No.

Russ. Hasn't he?

Nina. I haven't even seen him. I got up so late—I was frightfully tired—he'd gone out. What *did* he come about?

Russ. Money.

Nina. Money?

Russ. Pounds, shillings and pence. Cash. Coin. In a word, the goods.

Nina. Does he want money?

Russ. He does. From me.

Nina. But surely he's not hard up?

Russ. Oh no!

Nina. Then what?

Russ. Listen, my darling! Let's see what sort of stuff you're made of. He's not hard up—he's ruined. Got it?

Nina [*not grasping it*]. Ruined?

Russ. The failure of this last piece has put the lid on the King George Theatre. But the crisis has been approaching for a long time.

Nina. But he's never shown the slightest sign. Everything's gone on just as usual. Last month he agreed without a murmur to give me more household money. Only last week he was talking about getting a new car.

Russ. Yes, the final stages of these affairs are often very picturesque. A new motor on the eve of bankruptcy would have been a pretty touch.

Nina. I always hated the theatrical business.

Russ. You shouldn't. It's just like any other business. Except that possibly theatre-managers rather more than the rest of us indulge in the fatal habit of balancing their ledgers with the items known as hope, faith, confidence, optimism, calm trust in heaven. If the new piece had been a howling success, if it had run for two years and he'd made forty thousand out of it, Adrian would have been on his legs again. Only the new piece is a dead frost.

Nina. But this is simply terrible.

Russ. It's bad. Do you mean to say you never suspected anything?

Nina. How should I?

Russ. Hasn't he even given you a hint?

Nina. Of course he hasn't! He never talks business with me. Never, never! That's one of

his rules. He gives me chocolates. Sometimes he kisses my hand. He's always most *sweet*. But he never talks business. I expect I know less about things than his programme-girls. Oh! Isn't it scandalous? Scandalous? Look how he sent me away last night! And if you hadn't been here to save him I've no doubt he'd have come to me to-day or to-morrow and said [*imitating her husband*]: "Kitten, here's a box of those liqueur-chocolates you're so fond of. We're paupers. You'll have to give up everything and go and live in lodgings." That's what he'd have done! And that's how women are treated! . . . How much are you going to lend him?

Russ. Well, that's the point. I telephoned you to come along because I wanted to talk it over with you first.

Nina. "First." Then it's not settled yet?

Russ. No. I put him off last night. Asked him to get his accounts and things together, and let me see 'em.

Nina. Well, I suppose it won't make any difference to you how much you lend him. Ten thousand. Twenty. You wouldn't feel it if you parted with a hundred thousand. But why do you want to talk to *me* about it? My subject is chocolates.

Russ. I don't want to ask you how much I ought to lend him. I want to ask you whether I ought to lend him anything at all.

Nina. Are you afraid he won't pay you back?

Russ [*persuasively*]. *Nina*, don't talk like that. It's not worthy of you, and I don't like to hear you say such things. You know well enough I don't care a fig about the money itself.

Nina. Don't be hurt, boy. You must make allowance for my nerves. You generally do. . . . Then if it's not for money, what is it?

Russ. It's this. If Adrian knew about—our relations, would he take a penny from me? Would he ever dream of asking me for my help? He would not.

Nina. But he doesn't know. So what's the use of arguing like that?

Russ. He might find out—one day—sooner or later. Look at the position he'd be in then! Taken money from his wife's lover!

Nina. How could he ever find out?

Russ. Lots of ways. These things aren't often concealed for ever.

Nina. Hugh!

Russ. I mean it. He might find out in lots of ways.

Nina. Tell me one.

Russ. Well, it's not absolutely our secret, already. That girl of yours knows, for instance.

Nina. Don't worry about Stubbs. Stubbs and I understand each other.

Russ. Nobody understands anybody else. . . . Then there's Straker.

Nina. You don't mean to say you've told Straker!

Russ. Of course I haven't. But I bet he knows.

Nina. How?

Russ. By the well-known art of putting two and two together. Straker is one of the most learned experts in human nature I ever met. Suppose I happened to quarrel with this great man!

Nina. Well, that's quite simple. Don't quarrel with him. Straker knows which side his bread's buttered on.

Russ. That wouldn't help us. His bread's buttered on both sides. And there's another possibility—we might give the show away ourselves—either of us, but especially you.

Nina. Me?

Russ. Why not? You're only human. A word, a look, even a gesture might do it. That's one reason why I said last night that for us to squabble was dangerous. It robs us of our presence of mind, and perfect presence of mind is essential to the game we're playing. Last night when he came in all of a sudden was a devilish near thing. We've succeeded so far, but you can never tell. Why, carrying out a big burglary is nothing to our job.

Nina. Hugh, you're horrid.

Russ. No, I'm not. But the situation is.

Nina. Men are perfectly extraordinary. Adrian doesn't know, and he won't know. If he hadn't come to you asking for money, you'd never have said a word about the danger. Everything would have gone on quite smoothly as it has done for the past ten months. But now because he wants you to help him, you immediately begin to invent trouble. *If this, if that, if the other!* Where's the connection? Where's the logic? But my poor boy, with all your genius somehow you never could be logical. And I've yet to meet a man who is.

Russ. Just exercise your imagination, Nina. Put yourself in Adrian's place.

Nina. And will you exercise *your* imagination, Hughie? And will you put yourself in my place, Hughie? You say Adrian's done for if you don't help him; and yet you hesitate about helping him. Well, assume you don't help him. That means he's bankrupt and he'll have to give up the King George. He'll not get another theatre, or if he did he wouldn't get the capital to run it. That means shame and poverty at the best. What about me? I'm absolutely innocent, but I shall be the chief victim. Adored by one of the richest men in London—darling, I know you're devoted to me!—but a bankrupt's wife in the suburbs! Because, you know, *you* couldn't help me. If you helped me it would burst up our show—yours

and mine—at once. Remember even as things are how jolly careful you've had to be about giving me presents.

Russ. It's a hades of a hole. [*He looks at his watch, gives a start, and hurriedly rings the bell.*]

Nina. Anyhow, that's the logic of the situation. . . . What are you ringing for?

Russ. I must stop Adrian from rushing in here.

Nina. He's coming now?

Russ. He's overdue. You see you were half an hour late. I was expecting to get you away long before this. [*Enter Straker, L.*] Straker, if Mr. Dibble calls, show him into the billiard-room and ask him to wait. I'll ring when I'm ready.

Straker. Mr. Dibble is already waiting in the billiard-room, sir. I was just coming to tell you.

Russ [*sharply*]. Why didn't you show him straight in here as you did last night?

Straker [*with a wondrous look of defiance*]. Sorry, sir. My mistake.

Russ. Did you tell him I was engaged?

Straker. No, sir.

Russ. What did you tell him?

Straker. Nothing, sir. I confined my activity to showing him into the billiard-room.

Russ. I'll ring.

Straker. Yes, sir.

[*Exit.*]

Russ. You see that? That fellow knows everything. Everything! I bet he knows to half

a sovereign by how much poor old Adrian's liabilities exceed his assets.

Nina. What shall we do?

Russ. You'd better slip away. I'll 'phone you later.

Nina. But supposing the billiard-room door's open as I go out?

Russ. It won't be.

Nina. But supposing it is? Supposing Adrian happens to come out?

Russ [*after a slight pause for reflection*]. Go into the drawing-room.

Nina. No.

Russ. Go into the drawing-room. [*Pointing.*]

Nina. I shall listen.

Russ. You can listen. Run along.

Nina. Hughie!

Russ. And here. Don't leave your sunshade behind. I can't do with any theatrical scenes. [*He gives her the sunshade.*]

Nina [*taking the sunshade and following him as he moves towards the bell*]. Hughie, what are you going to say to him?

Russ [*with feeling*]. My beloved child, whatever the price is, I shall save *you*. You said you were innocent and, by God, you are!

Nina. Boy [*kisses him*]!

[*Exit Nina into drawing-room, L².*]

[*Russ rings the bell. He then perceives Nina's bag on the chair. He picks it up and with an*

impatient gesture, flings it after her into the drawing-room, shuts the door, and sits down at his desk.]

[Enter Straker, back.]

Straker [looking round, noticing the absence of Nina, and pausing]. Mr. Dibble.

[Enter Dibble.] [Exit Straker.]

Russ. Hello, Adrian. Come and sit down. Have a cigarette? [He pushes forward the cigarette-box.]

Dibble. No, thanks. I decided—resolved—to-day never to smoke until the evening. I found I was smoking cigars all the time, and as they cost money—I say, Hugh!

Russ. Well?

Dibble. Don't think I don't appreciate your seeing me here this afternoon. I know you ought to be in the City presiding over some Board-meeting of a million-pound company. I deeply appreciate it.

Russ. I say, Adrian!

Dibble. Yours to order.

Russ. I've got a revolver in a drawer here. If you keep on in that strain, it'll be used.

Dibble [humorously]. I shall keep on in precisely what strain I like, and be hanged to your gun. To continue. Your attitude towards me last night was perfect. The interview might have been very difficult—but your tact made it easy. Of course your way of handling the affair didn't

in the least surprise me. In fact I expected it. Still—What's the matter?

Russ. Nothing. Only I'm going to sleep. When you've quite decided to turn off the sentimental tap you might wake me.

Dibble. My boy, twenty years ago I should have called you a rum cove. To-day I'm afraid I must be content to address you as a funny old thing. I think I will have a cigarette after all. [*He takes one, and continues, while lighting it.*] You're in a hurry. I wasn't thinking. Forgive me.

Russ. I'm not in a hurry.

Dibble. Oh! You aren't in a hurry! Nevertheless, to work. You were quite right to ask me to furnish a statement. It's more business-like, and even between friends to be business-like in matters of business is always best. I ought to have brought a balance-sheet last night. Not that I should have assumed your willingness to oblige me, but in case you asked for it. You see the distinction? Of course you do. Well, I've prepared a balance-sheet. Here it is. [*He takes it out of his pocket.*] But before I show it you, there are just one or two general considerations—far more important to my mind than mere figures—that I want to set forth. You don't mind?

Russ. You go right ahead in your own way.

Dibble. This is one of your infernal Cuban

cigarettes, you uncivilised old devil. [*He puts the cigarette in the ash-tray and lights one of his own cigars.*] You know, my uncle and I between us have had the King George theatre for over forty years. He'd turn in his grave—poor soul!—if he thought anything was going to happen to the old place. And before his time connections of his wife had it for about seventy years. It's the finest theatre in London—because we've always kept it up to date,—and it has the finest situation in London. Everybody would admit that. It's nearly the only theatre in London that isn't in the hands of some syndicate or other.

Russ. I know! I know!

Dibble. You know, of course. But has it occurred to you that I've got the stage in my veins? I was brought up on the stage—or rather in the box-office. I eat theatre, sleep theatre, dream theatre. Nothing's ever happened to the King George before. *Therefore*—if I'm in Queer Street now, there must be a reason, an—er—extraneous reason. The reason is that the whole British stage is passing through a phase of great difficulty. You know the cause of that. And I needn't tell you that the phase is temporary and will pass. It must pass. It would be grossly unscientific to suppose that it won't pass. There's a gold-mine in the King George yet. And the proof is that I could sell my option to renew the lease for another seven years,—I could sell it

at a price which might startle even you. But I don't want to sell it, and only my creditors would benefit if it was sold. That theatre's my life. It's lasted from one King George to another King George, and it's my life. I can get a dandy thing for my next show, *provided* I can find money to mount it properly and to keep my creditors quiet for a few weeks. You understand?

Russ. I understand.

Dibble. Of course everything's risky. Consols are risky. By Jove they've been fatal to a lot of folk. But if I thought there was any unreasonable risk for your money in my theatre I shouldn't come to you for your money. Nay, if I thought there wouldn't be a handsome profit for you, I shouldn't come to you for your money. I'd file my petition first. You understand?

Russ. Adrian, why be so damned tedious? Surely you know who you're talking to?

Dibble. Sorry! Sorry!

Russ [*holding out his hand for the balance-sheet*]. Hand over.

Dibble [*handing the paper*]. Voilà!

Russ. Now let's see.

Dibble. Oh! It's quite clear—especially for a financial brain like yours. [*He continues while Russ is studying the balance-sheet.*] Then you know there's Nina. She hasn't the slightest notion—not the slightest. I believe in shielding women. Old-fashioned—it may be. I've spoilt

her. Oh! I've spoilt her. But I love to spoil her. And she's never had any trouble with me,—I'll say that for myself. There isn't an actress on the boards this day that has it over Nina so far as Nina's husband's concerned. And God know's some of 'em have manœuvred for a shot at me. Not that I take any credit for that. No. I'm that fond of Nina you wouldn't believe. Yes, you would, because you've seen it. You've seen how I adore the little cat. I'm supposed to be very light-hearted and easy-going. But I doubt if it wouldn't break me up to have to tell her I've gone bust.

Russ [*looking up: vaguely*]. Yes. . . . Yes, I can understand that.

Dibble. Of course you can.

Russ [*with emphasis, and rather severely*]. I see you're bound to need eleven thousand, and you might need between sixteen and seventeen.

Dibble [*intimidated*]. Is it more than you expected, Hugh? A theatre's a pretty biggish enterprise—yes, a pretty big cash-eating affair. [*Lightly.*] But of course I know you millionaires are just as careful over small sums as you are over big. [*Russ gets up and walks about.*] Don't you feel like forking out, my boy? If not, you've only to say so.

Russ. It isn't that I don't feel like forking out, Adrian.

Dibble. Then what is it?

Russ [*standing and facing him*]. You don't want me to lend you any money.

Dibble. Oh, don't I?

Russ. At least, I think you won't when I tell you something that you're not yet aware of.

Dibble. Oh! What's that! I should like to know it.

Russ. Adrian, for nearly a year I've been deceiving you. But I'm an honest man for all that. I'm not going to apologise for what I've done, and I'm not going to justify myself, and I'm not going to explain. There can't be any explanation—to you. I'll only say this—[*with emphasis*] I don't believe you'll care to accept money from your wife's lover. Last night we lied to you, Nina and I, and we've done it lots of times.

Dibble [*shattered*]. You don't mean that?

Russ. I do. There it is. What's the use of me saying I'm sorry. There it is.

[*Enter Nina excited. Dibble starts back. She approaches the men; then, at the sight of Dibble's face, hesitates to speak.*]

Russ [*to Nina*]. Please be quiet. If you can't leave the room, sit down.

Nina. I—I must——

Dibble [*furiously*]. Hasn't he told you to hold your tongue?

[*Nina, overwhelmed, drops into a chair and silently weeps. Slowly Dibble pulls himself together, to go. When he is near the door, back, he*

suddenly returns and picks up the paper from the desk.]

Dibble. I suppose I may as well take this.

[Exit.]

[A pause. Russ moves about. Nina ceases to cry, but does not show her face.]

Russ *[after looking at her meditatively]*. What a shock for him! What a shock! Talk about the shock of an operation—that people die of! Nothing. Nothing.

Nina *[her face still in her hands]*. His face was awful.

Russ *[gently]*. What did you say? *[Nina makes no answer. Russ bends down and very gently moves her hands from her face, and kisses one hand.]* What was it? *[She looks at him, and mechanically takes her hat off.]*

Nina. I say, his face was awful *[with sudden animation]*. But what about the shock to me? Oh, Hugh, you oughtn't to have done it!

Russ. Why not?

Nina. You've no right.

Russ. No right? You're mine—you're my own. You're absolutely mine. You've been mine for months. And now I've taken you—formally.

Nina. It was cruel. You should at least have warned me.

Russ. I couldn't. I didn't know. When you went into the drawing-room I meant to lend him the money. But when it came to the point of

actually doing it, I couldn't. It made me feel rotten. Then I saw in a flash the only course that would really answer the logic of the situation—and I took it.

Nina. It's all very well to talk of the logic of the situation.

Russ. Darling, you talked of it before I did.

Nina. I don't see any logic now. It seems no time at all since I was living with my sisters in my father's house in dear little Rutland, and our greatest excitement was a tennis-party. And some friends brought Adrian over one Sunday afternoon, and in two hours they all knew that although I was the youngest—except Anne of course—I'd made a conquest of the great Adrian Dibble. It was incredible. Everybody was staggered, but only Anne really liked it. It had a great influence on that child. Father hated it. He only owned a hundred and sixty acres, but if he'd only owned half an acre he'd still have shied at the stage. He warned me. And now look at me. And yet what have I done? Could I help it? Where *is* the logic of the situation?

Russ. Nina, I told you that you were innocent, and I told you that whatever the price I would save you. Perhaps I was to blame right at the start. I don't think so, but perhaps I was. Perhaps an archangel in my place would have behaved differently. Perhaps an archangel would have run off to Timbuctoo—and left you to eat your heart

out in London. And perhaps if you'd been an archangel you too would have behaved differently. But I'm a man and you're a woman and we acted like a man and woman, and I'm damned if I can see that we have anything to be ashamed of. We held on to one truth, and that was our love. It had to be wrapped up in lies. And more lies and still more lies. The truth inside the lies was bound to burst out one day. Truth always does. Well, I tore off all the lies, and I showed Adrian the truth. Was it better that I should tell him or that he should find out for himself? . . . Nina, get up.

Nina. I can't.

Russ [*helping her*]. Stand up. [*She gets up; he faces her.*] Look.

Nina. Look at what?

Russ. Look at life. It's worth looking at. But you can't look at it free of charge. The price is heavy. Sometimes the price is very heavy, as in our case. But it's worth the price. I can't pay all the price myself. I would if I could. But I can't. Life won't let me. You've got to pay your own share, and your share's heavier than mine. Pay it. By God, I'll make it worth your while.

Nina. Nobody ever talked to me like this before.

Russ. Nobody ever valued you as I value you.

Nina. Is this part of my unfinished education?

Russ. Yes. But it's not me that's teaching

you. It's life that's teaching you. Life's teaching both of us. Thank heaven it's not begun too late.

Nina. Too late?

Russ. You're young and lovely and irresistible. Suppose the crash had come later, when you were old and faded and tired [*softly*]. . . . Didn't I do right to tell him? [*Nina draws him to her and kisses him.*]

Nina. You did right. But oh! Hughie, if I'm to face life as you wish, you'll have to trust me. I can't do it otherwise.

Russ. I shall trust you.

Nina. No chocolate nonsense.

Russ. No chocolate nonsense. By Jove, child, you're awfully pale. Come and lie down. [*He puts her to lie on the sofa.*]

Nina [*with eyes shut, feebly*]. Don't call me "child."

Russ. I won't.

[*He puts a rug over her feet, looks at her, and then goes to the telephone.*]

Russ [*at the telephone*]. Give me Mayfair 7931, please. No! 7931. Yes, Mayfair. [*Pause.*] Is that the Curzon Club? Is Lord Landermere in the Club? [*Pause.*] Well, just see. And look sharp about it. What? . . . Oh no! He's probably in the card-room. If he is, put me through upstairs. Put me through upstairs. Tell his lordship Mr. Hugh Russ would like to speak to him.

Nina [*not moving*]. Who are you telephoning to?

Russ. Landermere.

Nina. What for?

Russ. I want him to do something for me. [*Into the telephone.*] Hello! What? Oh! He's coming. All right.

Nina. Do something for you? What?

Russ. You'll see—— [*Into the telephone.*] What? Who's speaking? Hello, Landy! How are you these days? [*Pause.*] Good. Me? Oh! I'm all right. Haven't seen you at the Club lately. [*Pause.*] Yes, I asked for you there. Look here, dear heart, sorry to interrupt your game. What? [*Pause.*] Making your exes, are you? You always do, you old sinner. What? [*Pause.*] No, not out of me. Look here, I want you to do something for me. [*Pause.*] Yes, I felt sure you would. Have you finished speculating in theatre business? [*Pause.*] Lost enough, eh? Well, you're wrong. You're mistaken. You haven't finished. You know Adrian Dibble? Adrian Dibble. King George. Yes. Well, he's up a tree. T, r, double e, tree. Yes. He wants help. [*Pause.*] I can't do it myself. . . . No, I won't tell you on the 'phone. But you'll know the reason soon enough. I want you to come across him by accident. See? By accident. No, you old fool. Don't breathe my name. If you did he wouldn't look at you. [*Pause.*] Never mind why. Make him

talk. Get into his confidence. [*Nina sits up.*]
He'll soon tell you his troubles. Then offer to go
in with him. . . . Offer to go in with him.
[*Pause.*] Let him see that you've still got the
theatre microbe in your system in spite of all your
melancholy experiences with leading ladies.
[*Pause.*] Anything up to seventeen thousand.
. . . seventeen thousand. [*Pause.*] Don't let
that worry you. I'm behind you. See? I'm be-
hind you. But Adrian mustn't know. [*Pause.*]
Oh hell! Don't I tell you I'm behind you. I'll
see you through. [*Pause.*] Oh! That's easy.
Sell some of those francs you bought so cheap.
[*Pause.*] Profit? Out of Dibble? If there are
any, we'll share 'em, Landy. [*Pause.*] Yes, that's
right. [*Pause.*] No, I'll see you grilled to a
cinder before I write you. It's not going to be
written. You'll just have to trust the notorious
City shark, yours truly. [*Pause.*] Oh yes, of
course. Next time I see you I'll explain it.
[*Pause.*] Yes. Now is it quite clear? Don't
you let on to Dibble that I'm in it. [*Pause.*]
Not on your life! [*Pause.*] How are the gees?
[*Pause.*] Not I! It's a mug's game. . . . How's
Editha? . . . Good. Give her my respectful
homage. [*Pause.*] No, no! Oh, go to blazes.
Au revoir, old chap. You're a sport. Good-bye.
[*He replaces the telephone and comes to the
couch.*] What? I've made you sit up? Well,
you see I'm hiding nothing from you. I'm trust-

ing you. I've made a good beginning. Is it all right?

Nina. It appears to me you're very fond of Adrian.

Russ. So I am.

Nina. Hugh, you are queer.

Russ. How am I queer?

Nina. You're positively quixotic.

Russ. Oh no [*seriously*]? But I don't see why Adrian should suffer because we've been deceiving him for months and months, and ended by knocking him all to bits.

Nina. Didn't he deceive me?

Russ. Deceive you? Adrian's not been carrying on, has he?

Nina. Hasn't he led me to believe that he was all right? And all the time ruin was staring him in the face!

Russ. Oh! That!

Nina. It's a trifle to you, of course.

Russ. Indeed it isn't. I perfectly understand your feelings, my darling.

Nina. And what's more, he's always kept a mistress.

Russ. No?

Nina. Yes. His theatre. He had a great silly affection for me, but he was passionately in love with his theatre. It was the thing that interested him more than anything else in the world, and yet

he would never let me be interested in it too. If he *had*, I might have helped him.

Russ. I think you would have done.

Nina. I'm sure I should. But he never would admit that I had any brains. He'd say I had,—oh, he was great on compliments—but he'd never admit it in practice.

Russ. Well, he was wrong there.

Nina. If he'd managed his theatre as well as I've managed his house, he'd never have had to scout round the town for money. Fancy going broke!

Russ. Well, after all, that's a thing might happen to any man—in business. It might happen to me. You never know.

Nina [*beseechingly*]. Hughie, I've borne enough this afternoon.

Russ. By heaven, you have! I'm a brute! Yes, I'm a brute and you'll know it one day! Now Adrian with all his faults was never a brute.

Nina. I should have thought better of him if he had been.

Russ. Then you want a brute!

Nina. I only want you to love me. [*She embraces him.*] Why do you look so worried?

Russ. Do I? This love is a bigger thing than I thought it was. Here I meant to die a bachelor and have lots of fun! *You* were fun at first, *Nina*.

Nina. You're not happy.

Russ. Yes, I am. But happiness is very dark and strange, Nina; it's most marvellous. Listen! Can't you hear all the leaves murmuring in the dark forest?

Nina. Oh! You man! Happiness is so simple.
[*A pause.*] Well, I suppose I must be going—for the present.

Russ. Where?

Nina. Home.

Russ. You have no home, foolish girl. You're uprooted.

[*They embrace.*]

CURTAIN

SCENE III

Same as Scene I.

Fifteen months later.

Afternoon.

Nina, in a tea-gown, is at the telephone.

There are flowers all over the room.

Nina [into the telephone]. Darling, I want you to come home for tea. Anne is here. . . . Anne, my sister. She's just back from the States. She's engaged . . . engaged to be married. His name's Alf—Alf. She wants to see you. . . . Dinner? No, she can't stay for dinner. She can't possibly. . . . Because she has to meet her fiancé, and it seems he's very particular. [*Pause.*] Oh, Hughie darling, you are tiresome with your business. You can get here in six minutes. . . . Car not there? Well, good heavens! take a taxi. . . . But you can go back afterwards if you really *must*. [*Pause.*] But I *want* you to. . . . She's my first visitor. . . . Oh, but you *must*. [*Pause.*] The very first thing your *wife* asks you to do. . . . I don't care. . . . I tell you I don't care. I want you to come—we both want you to come. [*Pause.*] Oh, very well then [*crossly*]; of course, if you

won't, you won't. But I do think—— What? . . . Ah! Good! I knew you could if you chose. . . . I say, you are a pig, but you're a dear. [*She makes the sound of a kiss.*] Did you hear that? But it's only on your forehead, because you're a pig as well as a darling. *Au revoir.* Anne says I am to tell you she's dying to see you. [*She replaces the instrument.*]

[*During the telephone conversation Straker has entered, L., and stands waiting.*]

Nina. Well, Straker?

Straker [*stiffly*]. You rang, madam.

Nina. So I did, yes. I want you to help me to move this desk—over here, you see. Here [*points*]. Quickly! Mr. Russ will be in for tea, and he'll be here directly. I must have the room all in order before he comes.

Straker. Will you permit me to point out, madam, that if the desk is moved over there the telephone can't stand on it, owing to the shortness of the flex; and Mr. Russ insists on the telephone being on his desk.

Nina. Oh! That doesn't matter. You must learn to exercise your imagination, Straker.

Straker. Very good, madam. In what particular direction?

Nina. Well, we can have the flex lengthened to-morrow, and run it under the carpet. Done in a moment.

Straker. Yes, madam.

Nina. Come along, then. Put your back into it.

Straker. Madam would not prefer to postpone the removal of the desk until the flex has been lengthened?

Nina. No, madam would not. Madam wishes it to be done instantly.

Straker. I am much pained to have to say, madam, that the state of my health will not permit me to participate in the moving of desks.

Nina. Oh! Are you ill, Straker?

Straker. I am somewhat seriously indisposed, madam.

Nina. Lumbago?

Straker. No, madam. My indisposition is scarcely physical. It is mental—or rather perhaps I should say spiritual. It's been steadily gaining ground for several days.

Nina [*laughing*]. Ever since this flat has had a mistress, Straker?

Straker. The two phenomena *have* happened to coincide, madam.

Nina [*laughing again*]. So you refuse to obey my orders?

Straker. Only in so far as my indisposition makes obedience impossible.

Nina [*still laughing*]. What a fool you are, Straker.

Straker. It is conceivable, madam. But we are all as heaven made us. Shall I send in two of the other servants?

Nina. Please don't trouble. Thank you, Straker.

Straker. Thank you, madam. [Exit L.]

Nina [running to door, L²]. Anne, Anne. Have you finished unpacking those cushions?

Anne [off]. Nearly.

Nina. Bring some of them in, then. I want you to help me with something. [Enter Anne, L², with her arms full of cushions.] You see that desk? It has to be put over here. See? I got Hugh on the 'phone and he's coming for tea. I told him to on the 'phone. I said you'd told me you were dying to see him.

Anne. But had I?

Nina. No. But you are, aren't you?

Anne. Frightfully.

Nina. We shall have tea in here. I love having tea in his study. Anne, I'll tell you something. It was in here he first kissed me. Now then, you push and I'll pull. It's quite easy. Runners, you see. [They begin to move the desk.] Furniture expeditiously removed by road, rail or sea. Estimates free.

Anne. Stop!

Nina. What on earth's the matter?

Anne. The telephone's going to be dragged off.

Nina. Put the little pet on the floor, woman! [Anne obeys.] Now then! Act II of this great realistic drama. Gently, the female Hercules! Don't shove blind. Insinuate. Insinuate. There!

[*The desk reaches its new place.*] I'm out of breath.

Anne. So am I. [*She drops on to the couch.*] Alf says there are only two kinds of women—those who are always out of breath and those who keep their servants for ten years.

Nina. I should think he must feel very exhausted after making one of those epigrams.

Anne [*simply*]. Oh no! He has a constitution of iron. I say, Nina, why did you want that desk over there?

Nina. Because as you come in the room looks so much better with it there. Before, the place seemed all one-sided.

Anne. Of course. Now I should never have thought of that. But you always had more brains than any of us.

Nina. And it's close to that window—for the light. You see, I do want him to be comfortable. When I first came here—before—before, you know—I thought this flat was the perfection of comfort. [*Exit L², for a moment; she returns with many cushions.*] But now I'm installed here matrimonially I find that it really wasn't comfortable at all. [*Distributing cushions.*] It's a trite saying, but men, even the cleverest—and Hugh's cleverness is simply diabolical, men don't understand comfort.

Anne. It was when we were talking about comfort that Alf said that the enigma of the universe

would never be solved until nations got into the habit of having two sorts of dictionaries, one for men and the other for women—with different definitions.

Nina [*moving the desk-chair to the desk*]. You've picked up a handful in Alf—I warn you, kiddie.

Anne. Oh, I know! But I adore handfuls, don't you?

Nina [*nodding*]. They're the pepper of the earth. [*Having fixed a cushion against the back of the desk-chair, she sits down with a contented sigh by Anne's side on the couch.*] Oh, kiddie, I'm so happy with Hugh. He's the *greatest* man. And I only *exist* to make him happy.

Anne. Alf says that men who make themselves happy will make everybody happy; but it's not quite the same for women.

Nina [*thoughtfully*]. I must see Alf. I might see him one evening instead of going to the Coliseum. What did he say about my divorce?

Anne. He said that some people's lives would be much simplified if they could be divorced before they were married.

Nina. This must be his second time on earth. [*She continues to arrange the cushions.*] I say, Anne, of course now you're engaged I can talk to you quite freely. What do *you* think of my divorce?

Anne. It seems quite simple and natural. You

do your hair differently, but no one could guess from looking at you or listening to you that you'd done anything very terrible. The fact is I can't understand all this fuss about divorce. After all, what is it?

Nina. It's very painful while it lasts. And the King's Proctor is really an extraordinary survival. But when it's over you have a curious airy feeling all day. It's like hearing a dentist's door bang behind you—when you're out on the doorstep again. [*She rings the bell.*]

Anne. And all your friends?

Nina. Well, of course, you know they were chiefly Adrian's friends, and stage people are always rather particular.

Anne. Are they?

Nina. Oh yes, they have to be. But Hugh's friends are perfectly splendid. They know what his income is. [*Enter Straker, L.*] Oh, Straker. Will your spiritual health permit you to serve tea in here immediately Mr. Russ arrives? [*Looking at the clock.*] We shall be in a hurry.

Anne [*looking at her wrist-watch*]. Yes, we shall. I must leave at five fifteen.

Straker [*coughing*]. Very good, madam. [*Exit.*]

Nina [*arranging flowers*]. Will you believe me that until I came here Hugh didn't have any flowers except what people happened to give him—mainly women. I determined to alter *that*—and at once. Fancy the poor fellow never having his

own flowers! Oh, kiddie, he's made me so happy I feel I must change his whole life for him. We've been married just three days.

Anne. Where were you married?

Nina. At a registry office. We both thought that would be in better taste. At the same time I—— [*Springing up.*] He's here! He's here! [*Rushing towards the door.*]

[*Enter Russ, back. Nina kisses him passionately on the mouth.*]

Nina. You were a darling to come. And I won't kiss your noble brow, after all.

Russ [*after looking round the room for a moment, to Anne, shaking hands and ignoring Nina*]. Well, Anne, my dear. I'm glad to see you back. How are you?

Anne. Getting rich.

Russ [*preoccupied*]. That's fine. Business good, then? What have you really been selling over there?

Anne. In U.S.A.? Expensive French lingerie—on commission.

Russ. Great demand, eh? Nothing like catering for elemental human needs, eh? Well, I hear you're engaged. Where did you pick him up?

Anne. Who? Alf? In New York.

[*Enter Straker, L., with tea. Nina busies herself at once with the tray.*]

Russ. Straker, what's that telephone doing on the floor?

Straker. I cannot conceive, sir.

Nina [ingratiatingly]. It's only there for a moment. I thought you'd much prefer your desk over here. I'll have the flex lengthened to-morrow.

Russ [to Straker]. Put it on that chair. And I say, Straker.

Straker [obeying]. Sir?

Russ [with an air of giving a most important order]. If I'm rung up from my office tell what's-her-name to put me through here at once. And if anybody else rings up, cut them off at once. I want the line kept clear for a special message.

Straker. Very good, sir.

Russ. Let there be no muddling.

Straker. No, sir. *[Exit, L.]*

Russ [turning to Anne again, as if their conversation had not been interrupted]. So you picked him up in New York. What is he?

Anne. He's nothing in particular.

Russ. But what's his profession?

Anne. He's an Englishman.

Russ. Wealthy?

Anne. No, when he wants money he just makes some, and when he's spent what he's made he makes some more. He says any fool can make a fortune, but it needs a philosopher to be idle.

Russ. And I suppose when he doesn't happen to be fool enough to make what money is wanted, you'll keep him?

Anne. Oh, of course! That's understood.

Russ. Well, Anne, you're the goods.

Anne. Oh, I am!

Nina [*who has been holding a cup of tea out to Russ*]. Here's your tea, dearest.

Russ. Serve Anne first.

Nina. But you look so tired, dearest. Anne doesn't matter.

[*With a gesture Russ indicates that Nina must give the cup to Anne, and she does so. The social atmosphere becomes more and more constrained.*]

Anne [*after a pause*]. Your flowers are lovely, *Nina*. They're all hot-house. They must have cost a fearful lot of money.

Nina. Oh no! About twenty pounds.

Anne. Good heavens!

Nina. Well, one must be comfortable. Can't live without money. At least I can't. Never could. [*To Russ, after having handed him his tea, which he takes in silent indifference.*] Some cake, darling? [*He shakes his head.*] You haven't said how you like my cushions?

Russ. No, I haven't. They must have cost even more than the flowers.

Nina [*nervously*]. Well, of course. In these days you can't get anything at all to lay your head on for less than five pounds. [*A pause.*]

Anne [*looking at clock and jumping up*]. I say! It's just on five. I must fly.

Nina. You said you hadn't to leave until a quarter-past.

Anne. Did I? I meant five.

Nina. You're sure you can't come back for dinner—Remember I've got a box for the first night at the King George Theatre. [*Russ gives a gesture.*] Room for Alf too.

Anne [*shakes her head*]. I shan't let you see Alf till he's got his new clothes. But I'll call to-morrow if I may. [*Preparing to depart.*]

Russ. Why all this hurry? [*Rising.*]

Anne. Have to meet Alf at his hosier's.

Russ. Oh?

Anne. Yes. He likes me to choose his braces, you see. To please me. He says it satisfies a woman if a man pleases her in little things. But it's no use a woman pleasing a man in little things unless she pleases him in big things too.

Russ. But what do *you* think?

Anne. Oh, I quite agree. Well, *au revoir*, Hugh. Ta-ta, Nina.

Nina. I'll see you out. [*She goes to the door, back.*]

Russ [*to Anne, as they shake hands*]. It seems to me your Alf must be my long lost brother. You bring him along here quick, or there'll be trouble between you and me. [*Anne laughs.*]

Nina [*at the door, back*]. Come on, kiddie.
[*Exit, back.*]

Anne [*looking towards the door to be sure that*

she is not overheard by Nina; confidentially].
Thunder in the air?

Russ. And lightning.

Anne. Thought so. That's why I'm going.
No umbrella. Don't want to get wet. Still, it's
all *right*, I suppose? Beautiful weather to-mor-
row?

Russ. Oh, sure. . . . Unless the last Trump
sounds. Good-bye, my dear.

[Exit Anne, smiling, back.]

*[After a moment the telephone bell rings. Russ
takes up the instrument from the chair.]*

Russ [into the telephone, in a low voice]. Hello!
. . . Yes. . . . That you, Sam? . . . Yes, it's
me. Cable come? . . . Have you decoded it?
. . . Well. . . . *[Impatiently.]* Read it. Read
it. *[Pause.]* Read it again. *[Pause.]* That all?
. . . All right.

*[Russ replaces the instrument and then suddenly
breaks into a wild dance of triumph.]*

[Enter Straker, L.]

Straker [ignoring the performance]. I just
wished to make sure that you had got through to
the office, sir.

Russ [stopping the dance]. I have.

Straker. Thank you, sir.

Russ. I say, Straker. You're a human being,
aren't you?

Straker. Only half a day a week, sir.

Russ. Consider this the half day. And be it

known to you that I've just brought off the biggest stroke of "big business" that's been done in this country for ten years past. Nothing will come out for several months, but you may take it from me—in strict confidence, of course—that before the end of this year of grace I shall be one of the three richest men in England.

Straker. Speaking as a human being—it's a bit of all right.

Russ. Isn't it! I must tell someone, and you're the only person I *can* tell. And you're worthy to know—I'll say that.

Straker. You flatter me, sir. And it pains me all the more to have to say what I have to say.

Russ [*in a new tone*]. Ah!

Straker. You mentioned the telephone being on the floor, sir. [*Pointing to the desk.*] I did not move that, sir.

Russ. Ah?

Straker. No, sir. In defiance of Mrs. Russ's orders I refused to move it.

Russ [*after a pause, sympathetically*]. You were wrong, Straker.

Straker. I know it, sir. But human nature will out. I admit I was inexcusably wrong, and that is why I wish to give notice, sir. You cannot keep me in your service, sir. And my conscience would not permit me to stay.

Russ [*thoughtfully*]. Bad as that, is it?

[*Straker nods gravely.*] Well, I quite see, Straker. But I'm sorry.

Straker. No doubt, sir. But, believe me, sir, you aren't so sorry as I am. Still, as the saying is, we must all bow to destiny, the high and the lowly alike.

[*Enter Nina.*] [*Exit Straker with majesty.*]

Nina. Darling, you're worried—about business.

Russ [*avoiding her approaches*]. Don't pretend, Nina, whatever you do.

Nina [*plaintively*]. Oh well, of course, if I've upset you about moving the desk, I'm frightfully sorry. But you ought to give me credit for acting for the best. I've only got one desire—to please you and make you happy.

Russ [*standing*]. I'm quite ready to admit that. But you only want me to be happy through you. Your idea is to take charge of my life. You can't do it, for the simple reason that you don't know as much about my life as I do. I'm an expert on my life and you aren't. Now why did you move that desk?

Nina. Because I thought it would be better where it is, of course. The room looks nicer, and I do want your study to look nice.

Russ. I appreciate that—yes, really. Still, you might have asked my views first. But has it occurred to you that where you've put it the light falls on the desk from the right, instead of from

the left, so that what I'm writing would always be in the shadow of my hand?

Nina. I never thought of that. I can write anywhere.

Russ. Doubtless. But you don't understand desks. A desk is a very complicated instrument. It requires a lifetime of study. Your frocks aren't half as complicated as my desk.

Nina. Well, I'll have it moved back. Adrian always let me do exactly as I liked with the furniture.

Russ [*resentful for a moment*]. Yes. But he got a decree against you in the end.

Nina. All right. All right. I tell you I'll have the whole thing moved back.

Russ [*smoothly*]. Not at all. I wouldn't mind using it where it is.

Nina. And be a martyr.

Russ. No. I wouldn't be a martyr. I'd write in the dark because I value your interest in me.

Nina. You aren't very encouraging. And I suppose you don't like the cushions, either?

Russ. Well, the cushions! *And* the flowers! Did you suppose I'd never seen a cushion before? Did you suppose I don't know what cushions are for? Didn't you reflect that if I hadn't got forty thousand cushions in this room before you came, it was because I didn't want cushions in this room?

Nina. But, darling, you ought to want cushions.

Russ. I do want cushions—but not in this room. I want them in your drawing-room and in your boudoir. Not here. This room is a hard room. Still, I'll keep your cushions, and I'll lie down on them, and I'll put them in the small of my back [*indicating the cushion on the desk-chair*] because it pleases me to please you. I don't want to make a fuss about either desk or cushions or flowers.

Nina. [*ingratiatingly*]. Then do smile.

Russ. I won't smile. I don't turn my smiles on with a tap.

Nina. Oh, darling! Have I committed any more crimes?

Russ [*not at all placated*]. Indiscretions. Serious ones. What's this about going to the first night at the King George to-night?

Nina. You said you'd be free, and you told me I could arrange what I liked. Everybody will be there—especially after the wild success of the last thing. So I got a box.

Russ. Well, we shan't go.

Nina. Oh, very well! But I don't see why we shouldn't. Everything's all over and settled. We aren't criminals, and the King George is a public place. And if Adrian's booming again, he's only got you to thank, though he doesn't know it. A nice thing if I can't go and see a play merely because it's Adrian's theatre.

Russ [*more severely*]. What you want more than anything else is commonsense, my child. And

if you can't learn it without lessons, you'll have to have lessons. I see myself flaunting with you in a box at the King George just now! I see myself!

Nina. "Flaunting!" "Flaunting!" Nobody wants to flaunt. However, I'd much sooner spend a quiet evening here with you. You know that, darling. I do hope that's all.

Russ. I regret to say it isn't. Why did you insist on me coming along for tea to-day? You knew I was exceedingly busy. You knew I didn't want to come. You knew how inconvenient it was for me. But no, you'd got into your head the idea that I must come. Your whole head was full of that idea. You were simply the embodiment of just that one desire. Nothing else counted. Nothing. My business might have gone to the devil, for all you cared. You'd made up your mind that I should come, and you were very disagreeable when I insisted I couldn't. [*Imitating her.*] "Oh, very well, then, of course, if you won't, you won't." But let me tell you I came with the intention of having it out with you. I've warned you before about letting your impulses run away with you.

Nina. Do you want me to grovel? Because if so——

Russ. No, I don't want you to grovel. I only want you to understand, right at the start, that it's one of your jobs in life to use tact—especially with me.

Nina [persuasively]. But, dearest, I'm always tactful—with everybody.

Russ. Are you? Then why has Straker just given me notice?

Nina. He hasn't!

Russ. He has.

Nina. I assure you I didn't say a word, even when he deliberately refused to obey my orders, and——

Russ [abruptly]. Don't tell me. I know all the essentials already.

Nina. I'm much less hard on him than you are. I've heard you fearfully harsh with him.

Russ. Harsh be damned! You don't understand the relations between men.

Nina. Well, of course, if you listen to Straker rather than to me—if it's a question of choosing between me and Straker——

Russ [still more severely]. It is a question of choosing between you and Straker. And I hope I needn't say that I choose you. Straker will leave to-night. He must. Nevertheless he was a perfect servant, to me; he's been with me for nine years; and I spent over three years in training him.

Nina [soothingly]. There are plenty more Strakers in the world, my poor aggrieved boy. When people have got as much money as we have, Strakers abound.

Russ [angrily]. Be quiet with your silly chat-

ter about money. [*With emphasis.*] You've got to learn there are things money can't buy.

Nina [*springing up*]. I'm not going to be bullied, and I won't stand any more of this. So I tell you.

Russ [*controlling himself, and sitting down, but speaking masterfully*]. Nina, you'll learn in a hard school. There are worse things than what you call bullying; there are worse things even than the Divorce Court, and you'll soon be up against them. Over a year ago in this very room I asked you to look life in the face. You did, but apparently you learnt nothing from the experience. Well, fate hasn't done with you yet. [*Solemnly.*] Let's hope that the next experience will be more profitable.

Nina. What do you mean?

Russ. I've been telling you for weeks about the big *coup* that I was preparing over the Brazilian Coffee Plantations merger. I didn't even hide from you that I'd risked everything on it. But this last day or two you seem to have lost interest in such a trifle.

Nina. Because I know you never fail.

Russ [*affecting great bitterness*]. I've failed. I've risked everything and I've lost everything. Six millions were involved. If I pay my creditors it'll be all I can do. I've got to begin again. It's the sort of thing that happens to the sort of man I am.

Nina. What *do* you mean?

Russ. I mean we haven't a cent. I mean that Straker would have had to leave anyhow. All the servants will have to leave. Our friends will doubtless follow them. We must give up the finest flat in London. The Berkshire place must be sold. The cars must be sold. The yacht must be sold. We shan't overlook Hyde Park in the future. But with luck our windows may have a good view of Parson's Green. Every penny must be watched. That's what I mean. . . . And it isn't a box of chocolates, either.

[*Nina gazes at him. Then exit, R.*]

Russ [*to himself, with grim triumph*]. I'll teach you, my girl. You see if I don't.

[*Enter Nina, with her jewel box, and two superb fur mantles.*]

Nina [*calmly*]. Boy, you're greater than ever. But you shall be proud of me. Sell these for your creditors. You've got the best reason for knowing that the pearls alone are worth twenty thousand. As for the ermine, I know what it would cost in Regent Street, to-day.

Russ [*taken aback*]. No, no! I couldn't think of such a thing.

Nina. You'd better begin to think of it at once then. Because if you insult me by refusing them, I'll walk out of the place and you'll never see me again.

CURTAIN

SCENE IV

Living-room in a small, shabbily-furnished flat, in Cholmondeley Court Mansions, Fulham. Doors back [leading to tiny entrance-hall], L. [leading to kitchen], R. [leading to bedroom].

It is essential that the room should seem small, and be small. Hence there must probably be a false proscenium, and the scene might be set within the previous scene. The room ought to have the air of a cheap, tawdry imitation of the previous scene, except that it is a living-room and not a study.

Fairly large table, L. This table is set for supper, but its contents are covered with a second white cloth. Tea-table, centre.

Nearly a month later.

Nina is alone, looking at the large table.

St. Pancras [opening the kitchen door, with a vivacious air of surprise and forced good-humour]. Did you ring, ma'am?

Nina [with a similar air of forced good-hu-

mour]. Seeing that I'm the only person in the flat——

St. Pancras. They usually just calls out, everything being so cosy in these flats. I'll be in in half a minute. I'm just making the tea.
[*Exit.*]

Nina. It's——

[*St. Pancras slams the kitchen door.*]

[*Nina examines the table in the corner.*]

[*Enter St. Pancras.*]

Nina. It's much too early to make the tea yet. Mr. Frating isn't in, you know.

St. Pancras. I was referring to my own cup o' tea, ma'am.

Nina. Oh! Do you take it so soon?

St. Pancras. I'm not feeling very well. My heart. Sinkings. Besides, my motto always is: Tea when you feel like it.

Nina [*nods*]. By the way, St. Pancras, what is your Christian name?

St. Pancras. I have no Christian name, ma'am.

Nina. No Christian name?

St. Pancras. Not as you might say, ma'am. Not professionally. It's more dignified like, at my age. I'm thirty-eight, and I'm done with Christian names. Nice people usually call me Miss St. Pancras. But I don't mind telling *you*, ma'am, that I'm a Mrs. . . . A widow, thank God! And what was it you were wanting, ma'am?

Nina. I was only wondering why you'd set the supper so early? We haven't had tea yet.

St. Pancras. Oh! [*Indicating the large table.*] *That!* Well, as you weren't up, I couldn't talk it over with you, could I? I did slip into the bedroom with *The News of the World*—they generally read that, and I took it in off the boy on the chance—but you didn't stir, so I—you see, ma'am.

Nina. Yes, yes. But——

St. Pancras. The supper? Well, my motto is, get forward with things. And as it's my Sunday night out——

Nina [*sweetly*]. But, Miss St. Pancras, you only came yesterday, and I thought the understanding was that you were to have every *other* Sunday night.

St. Pancras. Quite right, ma'am. Quite right. And I'm beginning to-night.

Nina [*sweetly*]. Getting forward?

St. Pancras. Well, if you put it like that.

Nina. But you had last night, didn't you?

St. Pancras. Ah! That was my Saturday night. That was my weekday night. To-night's my Sunday night. And as far as that goes, ma'am, you'll find most helps want *every* Sunday night. Now I don't, because I hold with being reasonable in all things. I hope it's quite agreeable, ma'am.

Nina. Oh, quite! I only wanted to be clear!

St. Pancras. Yes, ma'am. [*She arranges the top cloth of the table, which Nina has disarranged.*] Of course, if you'd prefer to set the supper *yourself*, ma'am.

Nina. Oh, no! It was very thoughtful of you.

St. Pancras. I like to oblige. I believe in obliging. And most ladies appreciate it. I know because I've been engaged in most of the flats in these mansions. They all come to me—in the end. You see the tea's over there on the small table, and the supper's here, and when it's supper-time you just push the table into the middle and whip off the cloth, and there you are—all ready and cosy. Anyhow that's how they generally do in these mansions, and if I don't know, who does?

Nina [*lifting the cloth*]. But why have you laid these porridge plates?

St. Pancras. Oh! That's for breakfast tomorrow morning. You see my motto is, get forward with things. You can't be too forward in these days. I hope I've done right in putting on the leg o' mutton, ma'am.

Nina. Well, I'm afraid we shan't be able to eat it.

St. Pancras. Not eat it? But it's quite fresh.

Nina. Yes, that's what's the matter with it. It's too fresh. We tried hard last night, but it beat us.

St. Pancras. Well, now you mention it, it *was*

a bit like chewing-gum. And when I came home last night from the Chelsea Empire and saw the dirty plates, I said to myself, I said: "What a pity they don't keep a cat!" Supposing we was to hash it, ma'am?

Nina. Hash it?

St. Pancras. Mince it. With a bit o' melted butter and Worcester Sauce. Oh, but you haven't any Worcester Sauce.

Nina. Can you mince it?

St. Pancras. I *could*, ma'am, to oblige.

Nina. I wish you would.

St. Pancras. Oh, I will, ma'am. I'll do it last thing, before I go out.

[*Noise of a cornet, off.*]

Nina. What *is* that dreadful noise?

St. Pancras [*sinking on to a chair*]. Well may you enquire, ma'am. If you ask me, it's No. 274 as was. He's moved down to this floor, and he always practises his cornet on Sunday afternoons. He's very musical. I left No. 274 partly on account of that cornet. It upsets my heart dreadful. If you could give me a drop of brandy, ma'am, only a drop, it might pull me together. Oh, dear!

Nina [*going to the Tantalus*]. I'm afraid my husband has the key of this thing. I'm so sorry.

St. Pancras. I daresay I've got a key as might fit it.

Nina. You!

St. Pancras [*producing a bunch of keys and opening the Tantalus*]. I thought I might have. [*Stretching her arm and getting a cup off the tea-table.*]

Nina. But how is it that you have a key that opens our Tantalus?

St. Pancras. Well, ma'am. Somehow keys do accumulate. And what's more, one Tantalus is much the same as another, and I reckon if it comes to a push I could open every Tantalus in these Mansions. [*Helping herself to the brandy.*] Not that I would! [*Drinking.*] Thank you, ma'am, thank you. You're very kind. And as I always likes to oblige them as obliges me, I'll be having a look at that leg o' mutton. [*She does not move.*]

Nina [*taking the carafe from her and putting it back*]. Thank you, Miss *St. Pancras*.

St. Pancras. I always think it's very curious they should be called Tantalus. Because you know they *are* so tantalising—for servants, I mean. I don't hold with 'em. It was one of them Tantaluses that first gave me a taste for brandy. Well, you see, there it was, every morning before breakfast when I cleaned the sitting-room, tantalising and tantalising me, and one morning I couldn't stand it any longer, and I got it open. Not that I'm fond of drink! No! Not what *I* should call fond of it. [*The cornet sounds again.*] Oh, dear! . . . There! Now he's got

it working he'll go to sleep for a bit. Oh! You can trust me. I know his habits. [*She rises and picks up the leg of mutton by the bone.*] I'll hash it a treat, you'll see, ma'am.

Nina [*steadying herself*]. By the way, you haven't cleaned my shoes this morning. I left them there for you. [*Pointing.*] I expect you didn't see them.

St. Pancras [*looking at the shoes*]. Gentlemen's boots, yes! Them I *do* clean. But not ladies'. There isn't a lady in these mansions as doesn't clean her own shoes. And quite right too.

Nina [*sweetly*]. But I really must insist——

St. Pancras. Anything to oblige—except ladies' shoes. We have to draw the line somewhere. I've learnt that. It was being ruined as taught me to draw the line. It's an ill wind as blows nobody any good, and being ruined did that for me, if it did nothing else.

Nina. Ruined, Miss St. Pancras?

St. Pancras. Yes, ma'am. I was ruined in service. You wouldn't think it to look at me. Oh! It was put right. Just as if nothing at all had happened. He married me. I was out of service for seventeen years, and when I went back I found a great change for the better, I assure you, and I could make a fresh start, a clean sweep as you might call it, which I never could have done if I hadn't left service, because I'm one of them, by nature as *stops*—faithful like. When I

was a girl you had one afternoon a month, and Church of England every Sunday night whether you felt like it or not, and they called it a night out! Night out! "Abide with me fast falls the eventide." I don't think. And do what you were told *when* you were told, *whatever* it was. And so I might have been to this day if I hadn't happened to be ruined. [*She goes towards the kitchen door.*]

Nina. Please take my shoes.

St. Pancras. I'll put 'em in the bedroom, ma'am. [*She puts them just inside the bedroom.*]

Nina [*astounded*]. *St. Pancras!*

St. Pancras. Oh! And the gas-man, ma'am?

Nina. What gas-man?

St. Pancras. Mr. Leadbitter. I know him, and I know the look on his face, and from the look on his face yesterday morning when he called I should say your gas is going to be cut off unless the bill's paid when he comes to-morrow morning.

Nina [*very stiffly*]. I'll—I'll see to it to-morrow. I'll remind my husband.

St. Pancras. Yes, but like as not you won't be up. Of course, I *might* wheedle him, but you better give me the money now, and then I'll be ready for his worship.

Nina. I've told you that I'll remind my husband.

St. Pancras [*going towards the kitchen, to her-*

self]. Of course, no one can pay what she hasn't got. But what I say is, it's better for a lady to have her allowance every week 'stead of every month. It pulls her up quicker somehow. But, speaking of gas, the penny-in-the-slot system's the best of all, I say.

Nina [*freezingly*]. *St. Pancras*.

St. Pancras [*swinging the leg of mutton*]. Ma'am.

Nina [*sweetly*]. I think you would prefer to take a week's notice.

St. Pancras. Oh! If it's like that—after I was ready to oblige, and all! [*She puts the mutton back on the table, goes to the kitchen, and then stops at the door.*] I'll say this for myself. I've never been divorced.

Nina. What do you mean?

St. Pancras. Your name ain't Frating. Considering that my sister's husband played the double bass at the King George Theatre for eleven years! It's wonderful how small the world is, isn't it?

[*Exit.*]

[*Nina sits down in despair, then exit, R., into bedroom, leaving door open.*]

[*Enter Russ, back.*]

Russ [*looking about*]. *Nina!* [*No answer.*]
Nina! Come off that bed and be bright.

[*Enter Nina.*]

Nina. Oh! So you've come.

Russ. According to arrangement, I have worked at the office by myself, and eaten three uneatable sandwiches for my lunch, and I am now hungry for tea, after which I shall be ready for our little Sunday outing.

[*Reluctantly Nina allows him to kiss her.*]

Nina. I'm too upset for any outing, and I don't want any tea.

Russ. What's the matter?

Nina. After all the trouble I've had with servants——

Russ [*cheerfully*]. Pooh! My child, I've not come home hungry to bother my head about those incalculable female bipeds.

Nina. That's all very well. But the woman has hardly been here twenty-four hours and she's given me notice.

Russ [*laughing*]. Or did you give her notice?

Nina. Well, we gave each other notice. She began flatly refusing to obey my orders.

Russ. When?

Nina. Why, a minute ago.

Russ. Cheer up, my girl. You don't give your orders in the right tone.

Nina. That's all very well. I'd like to see you do it.

Russ. What was the order?

Nina. I told her to clean my shoes.

Russ [*playfully pretending to be thunder-*

struck]. You don't mean to say she refused to clean your shoes!

Nina. Don't I tell you she did?

Russ. Are they *very* dirty?

Nina. No, they're quite clean.

Russ. Ah! Well, of course that does complicate the situation. Still, let's see. [*He rings the bell.*] Where are these quite clean shoes that want cleaning? [*Nina indicates the bedroom. Russ goes and gets the shoes and holds them up.*] These they? . . . Staggering thing how women manage to walk at all! Might be a pair of stilts. [*Enter St. Pancras.*] Jane.

St. Pancras. Yes, sir.

Russ. You see these shoes?

St. Pancras. Yes, sir.

Russ. You're sure you see them?

St. Pancras. Yes, sir.

Russ. Well, listen to me. Take them and clean them at once and bring them back.

St. Pancras. Yes, sir. [*She takes the shoes.*]

Russ. And I say, Jane.

St. Pancras. Yes, sir.

Russ. As soon as you've cleaned those shoes, serve tea. . . . And mind the water boils.

St. Pancras. Yes, sir. [*Exit into the kitchen.*]

Russ [*with the air of a conjurer who has performed a trick*]. Perfectly simple!

Nina [*resentfully*]. Yes, they'll do anything for a man.

Russ. You're a professional housewife, and part of the business of a housewife is to know how to handle human beings.

Nina. Oh! Do be quiet! . . . And how did you know her name was Jane?

Russ. I didn't know. I looked at her singular torso and guessed. Obviously her name must be Jane, just as yours must be Nina. Now, dearest, go and put your hat on. That'll take you at least half a day, and then we'll have tea and push off and enjoy ourselves free of charge.

Nina. You don't seem to realize how worried I am!

Russ [*amiably*]. We all have our little worries.

Nina. Yes, but I'm thinking about supper to-night.

Russ. Ah! What is there for supper?

Nina. Cold mutton.

Russ. Ah! Our old friend of yesterday evening. Well, a most masterful and unconquerable leg of mutton. What about it?

Nina. What about it? You won't eat it.

Russ. Well, that's not my fault.

Nina. It's not mine, either.

Russ. Pardon me. Surely you wouldn't attribute the calamity to a higher power! With great respect, it *is* your fault. You are a professional housewife and part of the business of a housewife is, first, to buy the right sort of mutton

or see that it is bought, and, second, to cook it properly or see that it is cooked properly. Either our faithful friend was originally a thorough bad lot, or he was grossly ill-treated in the oven. I don't know which, and I don't care. It's not my business. But I promise you I'll eat him to-night or perish in the attempt. [*Enter St. Pancras with the shoes. Russ takes them.*] Thank you, Jane. . . . I say, Jane.

St. Pancras. Yes, sir.

Russ. Water boiling?

St. Pancras. It isn't exactly boiling.

Russ. Well, see that it exactly boils, and then make the tea.

St. Pancras. Yes, sir.

Russ. And I say, Jane.

St. Pancras. Yes, sir.

Russ. Your name *is* Jane, isn't it?

St. Pancras. No, sir.

Russ. What is it, then?

St. Pancras. Diana, sir.

Russ. Well, I'm damned!

St. Pancras. And you aren't the first, sir.

[*Exit.*]

Russ [*surveying the shoes*]. So!

Nina. She's not touched them.

Russ. At any rate, they're still clean. That in itself is a triumph. [*Cajolingly.*] Now, Nina, pull yourself together and get under that hat.

Nina. I may as well tell you at once, I shall want some more money. I've only got fourpence halfpenny left.

Russ. Well, go the pace and buy me a packet of woodbines.

Nina [*changing from sullenness to angry impatience*]. Hugh, if you can't be serious there'll be a scene. Now, I've warned you! You seem to have no sympathy for me at all.

Russ [*sorry*]. Let's be serious then. We're still three days off the end of the month, and you've only fourpence halfpenny left? What have you to pay in the next three days?

Nina. What have I to pay? Scores of things!

Russ. I foresee difficulties then. But what in particular?

Nina. The gas. It'll be cut off to-morrow if I don't. Then there'll be no cooking.

Russ. The leg of mutton will certainly regard this as a judgment on you. [*Nina gives a frantic gesture.*] Sorry! Sorry! To return to the gas-bill. The gas-bill cannot be a surprise to you. You knew all about it. Why didn't you provide for it? I should like to see your accounts.

Nina. I haven't got any accounts.

Russ. Why not?

Nina. I never could keep accounts.

Russ. But when you were mistress of a house, quite a large house, didn't you keep accounts?

Nina. No, the cook kept them.

Russ. These revelations are appalling.

Nina. It's not my fault. Father never had me taught to keep accounts.

Russ. It's the business of children to remedy the criminal errors of their parents at the earliest possible moment. And it's most positively the business of a professional housewife to be able to keep accounts. Sound finance lies at the very root of efficient housekeeping.

Nina. I don't see that you've got much room to talk about finance. I married a millionaire, and here I am struggling along in this odious flat in this disgusting street—and Adrian's had two big successes one after the other and he's rolling in money. Rolling in it!

Russ [*calmly, but with a slight passing trace of acidity*]. Ah! Adrian! Well, if Adrian's rolling in money, it's thanks to me. And if it hadn't been for me you'd have been living, with Adrian, in an odious flat in a disgusting street at this very moment. So you aren't any worse off. I admit that my finance—er—went wrong. And I admit that you came up to the scratch like a good 'un. But I only failed by an incredible miracle of bad luck. Sheer chance! Supposing chance had been with me instead of against me, I should have been looked on as the biggest financial genius in England. Yet I'm just the same man. I didn't hide the risks from you and you took me for better or worse. [*With increasing cheerfulness.*] Let

me tell you it might have been still worse, a very great deal worse. I may recover. I've not bankrupted. I've kept my office open. But in order to do so, I took the most rigorous measures, where nine men out of ten in my position would have argued that when millions were lost a few pounds here and there couldn't matter either way. I kept an eye on every pound, yes, on every damned shilling. I made a bargain with you. I didn't treat you like a doll. [*With engaging mock solemnity.*] Have I ever, since we were married, insulted you with flattery or a box of chocolates? I have not. [*Nina remains obstinately silent.*] Come, my child, we'll tackle the gas-bill to-morrow morning. This afternoon, as arranged, is for the joy of life. The British Museum closes at six. For the third and last time, put on that bewitching hat that suits you so well.

Nina. I don't want to go to the British Museum.

Russ. Ah!

Nina. I hate the British Museum.

Russ. Ah!

Nina. If I feel better I wouldn't mind going to the Pictures to-night.

Russ. No, you don't! No, you don't! I'm damned if you shall go to the Pictures. You used to reproach me in the old days because I never took you to anything serious, uplifting, mind-enlarging. We definitely arranged to go to the

British Museum—it's free, by the way—and, by God, we're going. We'll join the rank and fashion of this city and have a rollicking afternoon with the Assyrian sculpture.

[*The cornet is heard in the opening bars of "Home Sweet Home."*]

Nina [*with a shriek*]. And that's what I have to live with!

Russ [*calmly*]. Darling, hundreds of thousands, millions, of our fellow-creatures have to live as we are living. And let me tell you that it takes a devilish clever fellow to make even any sort of a noise on a cornet. Also the beautiful melody should be sacred to us. Do let me exhort you to patience. [*He tries to caress her.*]

Nina [*repulsing him*]. Leave me alone! You've done nothing but find fault since you came in. And I hope to goodness you've finished.

Russ [*in a new tone, imposing himself*]. It just happens I haven't finished. I've scarcely started. I've merely been skirmishing. The main attack will now take place. As for bad housekeeping, you can learn; you will learn. I don't think twice about it. Housekeeping's only a very minor part of your job.

Nina. Oh, is it?

Russ. Yes, it is. I could keep house myself. But I couldn't do the big part of your job. No man could.

Nina. And what is the big part of my job?

Russ. It's to exercise the charm of your personality. It's to be delicate and exquisite and delightful. It's to provide a remedy against the coarseness of the money-earning world. It's to create heaven out of hell. Take this afternoon. This afternoon was your show. You had charge of it. I'd done my job, and I came here in the right mood to see you do yours; I was only too anxious to appreciate a star turn that I couldn't possibly do myself. And look at the mess you've made of the afternoon! Look at it! Have I made the mess or have you?

Nina. It's not so easy to be charming when everything goes wrong.

Russ. "Everything goes wrong!" Do a leg of mutton and a gas-bill and a hag named Diana constitute the whole of your universe? Have I gone wrong? And supposing everything *has* gone wrong? A duty is a duty. Any selfish vixen can be charming when everything goes right. There's no virtue in it at all. When everything goes wrong at the office a man doesn't sit down and give up the ghost.

Nina. No, but he comes home and abuses his wife. Why should it be any more my duty to charm than it's yours?

Russ. A nice question! Why do I raise my hat to you in the street? Why do I open doors for you and let you go out first? Why are you entirely relieved from the greatest nuisance on

earth—getting money? Why is your connection with money confined solely to the delightful operation of spending it?

Nina. Because I'm a woman, of course. That's fundamental.

Russ. It is fundamental, and it's my answer to your question. I remember on that night when Adrian arrived at my flat and nearly caught us kissing, I told you you hadn't kept your part of the bargain, and I said I'd show you you hadn't kept it. Well, I'm showing you now. Women like you, when any real difficulty occurs, want everything for nothing. You think the world ought to be satisfied because you put yourselves to the trouble of coming into it. You're wrong. The world isn't such a fool. The world gives you a lot, but it wants a lot back. Every woman has charm. Why, damn it, Diana has charm. And it's every woman's business to show her charm, especially on state occasions like Sunday afternoon in Cholmondeley Court Mansions, in spite of legs of mutton and gas-bills. And now I'm going to the British Museum, and I'm going alone.

Nina [*softening*]. Hugh, any one would think I didn't love you.

Russ. That's just what any one *would* think. You'd like to kiss me and call it square, but there's more in your part of the bargain than kissing.

Nina. I told you you were a brute.

Russ. No, you didn't. I told you. And I said

you'd know it one day. I'm bound to be a brute. It's my business to be a brute, and it's your business to charm the brute—particularly when you feed him on Dunlop mutton. Charm's a gift to be carefully cultivated. It wants brains. You've got brains. I've never seen 'em, but I'm convinced you've got 'em. Use 'em. [*He turns to leave.*]

[*The bell rings.*]

Nina [*springing up*]. A caller! Who can it be?

Russ. I'll see.

Nina. No, let St. Pancras go.

Russ. Rot! [*He goes out to the hall and opens the front door.*] Hello, Anne.

[*Enter Anne and Russ.*]

Anne. Well, people, I'm so glad you're in.

Russ. I'm not in. You think you see me here, but as a fact I'm at the British Museum, milking an Assyrian cow. Nina wants to talk to you.
Au revoir! [*Exit.*]

Anne. How bright and incomprehensible men are! I hope you're just as cheerful—in your new flat, darling. [*She kisses Nina.*]

Nina [*brightly*]. Oh, yes! Rather trifling, isn't it?

Anne. What?

Nina. The flat. We took it furnished, you know.

Anne. A bit small. But there's one good thing

about a small flat, you always know where you are. What's the accommodation?

Nina. Well, there's dining-room, drawing-room, my boudoir, Hugh's study——

Anne. Really?

Nina. Yes, they're all *here*. See?

Anne. What a philosopher you are, *Nina*! And is this the bedroom? [*Pointing.*]

Nina. It is.

Anne. And what else is there?

Nina. Nothing—except the dug-out.

Anne. What's that?

Nina. The kitchen, baby. We keep a microscope to see it with.

Anne. The bedroom seems rather jolly. Can I go and look at it?

Nina. Do. It won't take you long.

Anne. I'll take my hat off. [*Exit, R.*].

[*Enter St. Pancras, L., with the tea-tray.*]

[*Nina and St. Pancras gaze firmly at each other.*]

St. Pancras [*whispering*]. Yes, ma'am. But I didn't clean them for *you*, neither. [*Exit, L.*]

[*Enter Anne.*]

Anne. I see you've managed to get a servant.

Nina. No. A mistress.

Anne. Well, of course. That's what I meant. What do you want to talk to me about, grandma?

Nina. Me? Nothing.

Anne. But Hugh said you wanted to talk to me.

Nina. Oh! That's his notion of humour. It's jolly to see you, old thing. Look here, pour out the tea for me, will you?

Anne. Certainly. [*She pours out the tea with great celerity.*] If all the furniture's as solid as these cups, it's better than in most furnished flats. Here you are. I see you need it.

[*Nina takes the cup, tries to drink, and spills the tea in a sudden splutter of sobbing.*]

Anne [*calmly soothing Nina*]. My dear! So this is what you wanted to talk to me about! There! There! It's not gone on your dress. Now try again. [*Nina drinks.*] That's it. Now talk.

Nina [*shaking her head, and gradually controlling herself*]. It's no use talking.

Anne. Well, then, let's have a right down good tea. [*She begins to eat and drink.*]

Nina. We've been in this awful wigwam nearly a month, and I haven't seen a soul because you've been away and he thought it would be better for us to hide ourselves completely and take a new name. I've sacrificed everything—even most of my clothes. I'm sure I've done all I could to make him happy.

Anne. And isn't he happy—I mean with you? Of course I know riches are a curse, but you couldn't expect him to be happy in a general way now he's a pauper, could you, darling?

Nina. He makes out I spoil his life—at any

rate his Sunday afternoons. He *won't* be happy with me.

Anne. Then it's very naughty of him. I dare say he does it on purpose. Alfred says there are two sorts of husbands—those who'll stand anything, and those who are only really happy when they are miserable. [*Nina sobs.*] And yet Hugh *seemed* rather happy when he went out.

Nina. Ah! That was because he thought he'd put me in the wrong. He simply loves to beat me.

Anne. Beat you, darling?

Nina. Well, you know what I mean. Will you believe me when I tell you that he actually made a tremendous scene only three days after we were married?

Anne. Three days *is* rather short. But perhaps he was counting the time from the beginning of the divorce.

Nina. Anne, you aren't very sympathetic.

Anne. Darling, I am. Only I'm so damned judicial too. But I'm sure Hugh's entirely in the wrong.

Nina. He isn't. He's quite right.

Anne. Oh! Then it's *really* serious. Alf says that a wife can always forgive her husband when he's in the wrong. It's when he's fool enough to be in the right that she owes it to herself to be implacable.

Nina. Child, marriage is awful. I've had two doses—one yellow and the other red—and I can

tell you it's awful. And the more innocent and well-meaning you are, the worse it is for you. It's the deadliest process of disillusion on the face of the earth. Believe me—I know what I'm talking about.

Anne. I'm going to be married next week.

Nina [*ecstatically kissing Anne*]. Oh, you darling! I'm *so* glad.

Anne. Yes. Alf's got hold of quite a lot of money—whenever he puts himself to the trouble of opening his mouth, banknotes seem to drop into it. By the way, I suppose you're quite certain that Hugh *is* poor.

Nina. Poor? We have to live on less than nothing! He's sold the place in the country as it stood, and both cars, and the yacht, and the furniture in the flat, and got rid of the lease of the flat. He found this flat himself in no time. The thing was all done in three days. Every penny he could put his hands on had to go to those greedy creditors. I told you how many millions he'd lost at one blow. What makes you ask?

Anne. Well, Alf doesn't seem to think he's poor.

Nina. You've not told Alf! You promised not to say a word to anybody.

Anne. Alf *isn't* anybody. Alf's bought a lot of shares in the San Paulo Coffee Corporation, and they've suddenly gone up from twenty to forty-nine, because all the coffee in Brazil is being

turned into a monopoly, and he says that it's Hugh that's done it, and he'll make five millions out of it.

Nina. Who will?

Anne. Hugh.

Nina. How absurd! Why, I can't even pay the gas-bill!

Anne. You said all the furniture in the flat had been sold. But yesterday when I went past I could distinctly see all three of those big china vases in the three windows of the drawing-room.

Nina. But Hugh *told* me it had been sold, and I'll say that for Hugh, he never lies to me.

Anne. Alf says that if a man never tells a lie it's because he can't tell a lie, and if he can't tell a lie he ought to see a doctor at once—the case is urgent.

Nina. Do you mean to say that Hugh would play this enormous trick on me? It's inconceivable. It would be too dangerous. And nobody could carry it through.

Anne. Hugh could. If he's cornered all the coffee in Brazil, he could do *that*. It's just the sort of thing he would do. But *why* should he do it?

Nina [*greatly excited*]. My God! . . . "Why should he do it?" He thought he'd teach me a lesson. That's why he did it! . . . My God! I'll teach *him* a lesson. *Was* he at the office this morning? *Has* he gone to the British Museum

this afternoon? Child, he's been leading a double life!

Anne. Nina!

Nina. And I gave him all my jewels and furs—and he *took* them! Anne, you're going out with me immediately. Put your hat on. Put your hat on, I say, and bring me mine and my gloves. [*Anne goes to the bedroom door.*] I'll teach *him* a lesson. But I must do something *now*! [*She looks round, then opens the kitchen door.*] St. Pancras, light all the rings in the gas-stove, all of them, and keep them full on till I come back, even if I don't come back for a week.

CURTAIN

SCENE V

Same as Scene I.

Evening of the same day.

The stage is empty.

Enter Nina and Anne, back, both in full evening dress, rather stealthily. Anne is carrying a valise, which she puts down.

Anne. No, not a soul.

[They take off their wraps.]

Nina. At any rate we can sleep here. The beds—I should say the bed—at the Mansions seemed to me to be scarcely worthy of the name of Cholmondeley. In fact I'm sure the bed was stuffed with new potatoes and the pillows with hairpins.

[Enter Straker, L.]

[Nina affects to start back.]

Nina. Anne, the great and sublime Straker has passed away. This is his ghost. His spiritual indisposition must have killed him, poor fellow!

Straker. Pardon me for contradicting, madam. I am in the best of health.

Nina. But this is absurd, ghost. You said you were leaving. You said you could not possibly

stay. You gave notice. All the servants have gone.

Straker. Except myself, madam. With the assistance of one of the staircase charwomen I have done my best to keep the flat tolerably clean. The fact is, I have stayed on.

Nina. Doubtless to oblige Mr. Russ.

Straker. As madam says.

Nina. Where is your master?

Straker. Working in the drawing-room, madam.

Nina. Working? In the drawing-room? Why in the drawing-room?

Straker. Because the flex of the desk lamp here has not yet been lengthened.

Nina. Really! Now, Straker, this flat is full of mysteries. I want you to enlighten me.

Straker. If the matter does not transcend my knowledge, madam.

Nina. I came here late this afternoon with a latchkey which I took away by mistake nearly a month ago, but I could not open the door. I come again to-night, and I can open the door. Therefore this afternoon the door must have been fastened on the inside.

Straker. That's right, madam.

Nina. Therefore some one was in the flat.

Straker. Correct, madam. I was.

Nina. Yet this afternoon I rang and there was no answer.

Straker. True, madam. I heard eleven rings, both violent and persistent. I did not answer, because I was in the flat alone, and I had orders not to answer any rings if I was alone. Mr. Russ when he comes taps on the glass.

Nina. Thank you. Will you kindly put this valise and the wraps in my bedroom.

Straker. Certainly, madam. [*He does so.*]

Nina [*looking round, to Anne*]. No flowers, I perceive.

Anne. By request.

Nina. Straker, I feel sure you will not care to stay another moment.

Straker. No, madam.

Nina. Pack your bag. Go. As you go, bang the front-door. I shall then know that you are gone. If there are any wages to settle, call at the office.

Straker. Perhaps I had better just speak to Mr. Russ.

Nina. You had better do nothing of the kind. Is it clear?

Straker. Yes, madam.

Nina. Don't forget to bang the door after you.

[*Straker bows. Exit, L. Nina softly but sternly approaches the door of the drawing-room, L². Anne follows her. At the door Nina hesitates and draws back a little.*]

Anne. Nina, darling.

Nina. Yes.

Anne. Don't be hard on him. After all, he is a dear. I love him.

Nina. That's what's the matter. Every woman's in love with him. But don't worry, my child. I shall be perfectly charming with him. You'll see.

Anne. Would you like me vanish into the bedroom?

Nina. By no means—unless of course the situation gets really—what shall I say?—delicate. Just have a peep into the drawing-room, will you?

Anne [*opening the drawing-room door, and calling out gently*]. Peep-oh! Peep-oh! I see you. [*She laughs with a delicious invitation in her voice.*]

[*Enter Russ.*]

Russ [*greatly taken aback at first; then recovering himself*]. We—ell—we—ell, this is, indeed a pleasure!

Nina [*charmingly*]. We argued that you would hate to spend the evening quite alone, dearest.

Russ [*appreciating the pretty game she is playing so agreeably, and playing it himself*]. Sound reasoning! Sound reasoning!

Nina. So we just came along—but not without considerable inconvenience.

Russ. Inconvenience? Sorry to hear that. But it makes me appreciate all the more how jolly it was of you to come.

Nina. Yes, you see I've been staying for nearly a month in a funny romantic place called Fulham. Ever heard of it? . . . How silly of me! Of course you have. You know all about it. You've been there yourself, unless my memory fails me, you old dear. Well, Anne called on me, and we settled to come up here. But curiously enough I'd only got fourpence halfpenny—and no clothes. However, you remember I'd deposited one or two frocks at Anne's, so we went there, and made ourselves as smart as we could in our simple way, and then we dined together at the Ritz.

Russ. On fourpence halfpenny?

Nina. No. On eleven pounds sixteen and fourpence. I never had such a dinner. Anne kindly lent me twenty pounds.

Russ. Wine, I suppose.

Nina [*nodding*]. Few, but the very best. Also peaches, wonderfully out of season.

Russ. Why! It must have been a regular picnic!

Nina. It was. By the way, you might give Anne the twenty.

Anne. Oh! Any time will do.

Nina. No time like the present, is there, darling Hughie?

Russ. None. [*He repays Anne.*]

Anne. Thanks awfully.

Nina. I forgot to tell you—before leaving Fulham I had all the gas-rings in the cooking stove

lighted at full, and they're burning at this very moment.

Russ. What for?

Nina. Don't pretend, Hughie. You know perfectly well that whenever people like us leave a place like Fulham they always leave the gas-stove burning. It shows a broad mind. You *are* a good actor. [*She slightly caresses him.*]

Russ. Yes, yes. I understand. It's all a most wonderful surprise to me.

Nina. Surprise?

Russ [*humorously*]. Oughtn't it to be?

Nina [*enticingly*]. But you are glad to see us?

Russ. I'm simply delighted, old girl. I'm simply delighted.

Nina. I am, too. You great boy! Anne says you're a dear, and so you are. And you're my eternal boy. [*She touches him.*] You know, after all I really *do* prefer this place to Fulham, I do honestly. I'm not joking.

Russ [*approaching Nina*]. Sweetheart! [*Nina edges away from him a little, with an inviting smile.*]

Anne [*who has been moving prudently towards the bedroom door, to herself*]. Would she call this delicate? [*Exit, R.*]

Nina [*with demeanour swiftly and dramatically changed to one of angry resentment, after Anne's exit*]. I'm not your sweetheart. You've behaved

in the most disgraceful way. I trusted you, and you cheated me.

Russ [after a slight pause, collecting himself]. No, darling.

Nina. I'm not your darling.

Russ. You certainly are.

Nina. I tell you I won't be.

Russ. Very well, then. Adversary! Foe! Enemy! Shrew! Termagant! Spitfire! Fury! Wasp! Vixen! Virago! Nevertheless—a darling! As for cheating you, I wouldn't cheat you out of a cent. I've saved quite a lot of money this last month—hundreds of pounds; and I'm going to write you out a cheque for the exact sum.

Nina [menacingly]. You'd better be careful.

Russ [lightly]. I have been. In fact, I've carried economy to the point of avarice.

Nina. You've been leading a double life.

Russ. Did I miss a single Fulham breakfast or a single Fulham dinner? Haven't you and I struggled with the same mutton? Haven't we lain awake every night side by side on the same range of mountains that people in Fulham call a bed?

Nina [sarcastically]. Then if you haven't cheated me and you haven't been leading a double life, I suppose you really *are* poor, after all!

Russ. Very poor—compared to Rockefeller. I doubt whether I'm worth more than a miserable

seven millions. Still, trifling as it is, it's all yours, every million.

Nina [*bitterly*]. It's not been mine this last month.

Russ. Oh, yes, it has. Only I've been keeping it for you.

Nina. You've been lying to me day after day.

Russ. Oh, darling!

Nina. Were you lying when you told me you were ruined—that afternoon?

Russ. Hypercritical and fastidious persons might assert that I was not adhering strictly to the truth.

Nina. Were you lying to me when you said you'd sold the house in Berkshire, and the yacht and the cars?

Russ. Well, I haven't quite sold them *yet*. But I will do it if you like.

Nina [*ruthlessly*]. Were you lying to me?

Russ. *Nina*, how obstinate you are! . . . Yes, I was! There! But don't you think I lied with great convincingness and attention to detail?

Nina. What made you do it?

Russ. It just came into my head—all of a sudden—like that.

Nina. That's nothing but a schoolgirl's reason.

Russ. I know. But you always behaved so damnably like a schoolgirl, and we didn't seem to get on—so I thought if I began to behave like a schoolgirl too we might hit it off a bit better.

Nina. I ask you what made you do it. I suppose you thought you'd teach me a lesson.

Russ. Both of us, darling. I thought I'd teach both of us a lesson. I thought we needed it.

Nina. You'd no right to do it. No right whatever!

Russ. Yes, I had a right. And may I add that the thing wanted some doing. It wanted a mighty lot of doing. It was a marvellous tightrope performance on my part. And I'm rather proud of it. And look at the valuable experience you've gained.

Nina [*cold, ruthless*]. You can be as funny as you please, you know you'd no right to do it. You may be worth seven millions, but that gives you no right to try exasperating experiments on my life.

Russ. I had a right to try a very useful experiment on our joint lives.

Nina. What right?

Russ. I was in charge of our joint lives, and I still am. I'm in charge because I'm cleverer than you and stronger than you, and because I've got more sense than you and more sense of justice, and because I can master you. That's the bed-rock of the matter, if you particularly want to hear things called by their names. Anyhow I did this thing. And there it is. And it's over.

Nina. Oh, no, it isn't over! [*After a pause, in a more tragic tone.*] You made an appeal to my

loyalty. I responded with all the loyalty and love for you that was in my heart. And your appeal was a false appeal.

Russ. That I admit. And I also admit that I was pretty considerably shaken when you weighed in so splendidly with your jewels and furs. It was worth while to see you in that moment, Nina. I've kept the jewels and the furs all right.

Nina. Never will I wear them again! You hear me? I gave them in what I thought was a great crisis. But there was no crisis. You were playing with me.

Russ [*contrite*]. Look here, Nina, I'm sorry.

Nina. No, you aren't.

Russ [*hurt*]. Very well, then. I'm not sorry.

Nina. And you don't regret it for one minute.

Russ. To be truthful, I don't. And let me tell you that rising to a crisis isn't everything. A woman like you can rise to a crisis magnificently. You've done it twice to my knowledge. Unfortunately life isn't one long crisis. Life's very—daily. You can pay gorgeously in bank-notes. But there's such a thing as small change; life wants a lot of small change, and you don't seem to have enough. Your supply of small change failed when the Chancellor of the Exchequer rang me up on the 'phone. It failed when you insisted at all costs on me leaving my office to come here for tea with Anne. It failed when you turned this room upside down to suit your own taste. And

it failed this afternoon in beautiful Fulham over mutton, servants and footwear.

Nina. And you couldn't see this afternoon that I was simply worrying on your account. Do you suppose that *I* care what mutton is like? If I thought only of myself I should have nothing but tea and buns. Hasn't it occurred to you that I wear my very shoes only to look nice for *you*?

Russ [more calmly]. I seem to have heard that theory before—especially about the buns. There may be something in it. But it's no excuse for you bursting up our Sunday afternoon. [*With an outburst.*] No woman has any sense of proportion. [*Calmly again.*] Hang it all! I had a fine surprise for you. I meant to bring you here after we'd been to the British Museum. But no! You wouldn't budge. As a matter of fact I went back to dear old Fulham for you. Well, you'd fled, and Diana of the Ephesians said you wouldn't be in for a week. Then I gave it up. I felt sure you'd found out about my—er—innocent deception, through Anne, and you'd turn up here in due course.

Nina [sneering]. Ah! So I was to be brought back. I'd learnt my lesson, eh?

Russ [blandly]. You'd learnt part of it, at any rate. You'd kept up the supply of small change for about three weeks. Then I noticed it was beginning to run short. Pity it dried up altogether on the critical afternoon! Still, three

weeks is three weeks, and easily beats all your previous records.

Nina. I won't be talked to like this, and I won't be treated like this.

Russ [with bland emphasis]. No, of course you won't. You want to be treated like a doll again—a patent doll that'll eat chocolates.

[The front door bangs. Both start.]

Nina. Anyway, he's gone.

Russ. Who's gone?

Nina. Straker. I gave him his marching orders the moment I saw him.

Russ [loudly]. Do you mean to say you've dared to dismiss my own man without consulting me?

Nina [loudly]. Yes, I've dared. And if he ever sets foot in this flat again I'll tear his eyes out.

Russ. Well, this ends it. Nothing will ever teach you.

Nina. Very well, then. It ends it. You thought you could master me, did you? We'll see. [*More loudly.*] We'll——

[Enter Anne, in her wraps.]

[Nina almost breaks down; then recovers herself.]

Anne. You horrid darlings. [*Pause.*] I say, you horrid darlings!

Russ. Go on. Go on. Don't mind us.

Anne. I couldn't help hearing in there. Moreover, Nina told me *everything* over dinner. And

as I'm so much younger than either of you, I thought before I went I'd give you the benefit of my superior wisdom.

Nina. It's no use, Anne.

Russ. Let her rip, Nina. She can't do any positive harm.

Anne. Now it seems to me you've both forgotten a rather important thing. Nina, you've forgotten that the thing you've married is a man, and Hugh's forgotten that what he's married is a woman.

Russ. I'm entitled in self-defence——

Anne. Be quiet.

Nina. You'd better understand at once——

Anne. Be *quiet*. Further, this marriage of yours is a very peculiar one. The husband is not absolutely perfect. However, husbands often are imperfect. What's so very odd about this marriage is that the wife isn't perfect either. Who ever heard of a marriage where neither the husband nor the wife was absolutely perfect? It's a bit awkward, of course; but it has its advantages, because perfection is very tedious; and anyhow, what are you going to do about it?

Russ. I don't pretend to be perfect.

Nina. I'm sure *I* don't. But this kind of thing can't go on for ever.

Anne. That's just what it can. In fact, it will. It's only just beginning. I know all this because I'm so young.

Nina. Hugh will never, never, understand me.

Anne. No. Nor you him. At least, not completely,—like I understand you both. But you'll understand each other better and better. You've learnt lots this last month. You've made heaps of progress; and you'll keep on making progress.

Nina. I've been treated shamefully.

Anne. So have I been treated shamefully. [*With mock eloquence.*] My friends, it is the fate of every human being to be treated shamefully. So you've nothing to make a song about on that score, Nina.

Russ. True, Solomon. But I must say you're not throwing any very bright light on the subject, Solomon. The difficulty between Nina and me is fundamental.

Anne [*sweetly*]. Hugh, you faintly amuse me. Here you've made a great fortune and yet you haven't perceived that the only thing fundamental in your little show is that you and Nina are most absurdly in love with each other. You paid a high price for Nina and Nina paid a high price for you, and now you want to break one another as if you were two children playing with two toys.

Russ. There can be no real understanding until the whole position has been logically argued out.

Anne. The sweet innocent lamb has not discovered that marriage isn't logical and never will be. He doesn't see that the husband who argues is lost.

Russ. Perhaps marriage isn't logical. But anyhow it's a bargain, and the bargain must be kept.

Anne. Marriage a bargain! [*She laughs.*] It's more like a game of poker, and in this particular game Nina has called your bluff.

Russ. All this sounds suspiciously like the voice of Alf.

Anne. It isn't Alf. It's me. [*In a peculiar tone.*] Alf is off.

Nina. What do you mean, child?

Anne. I—I've just told you I've been treated shamefully. You saw that letter that was waiting for me when we got to my place. It was from Alf. It conveyed the information that he's already spent two years in jail for bigamy, and that if he marries me he's likely to spend another two years in jail for bigamy. His conscience pricked him, and he thought he ought to warn me.

Nina [*very compassionately*]. You poor thing! And you never breathed a word!

Russ. My dear girl!

Anne. No. You're both very kind, but you needn't sympathise. It's better as it is. [*With comical sorrow.*] I always felt that Alf was too good to be true. [*She wipes her eyes and smiles up at the pair. Nina bends down to kiss her.*] You're kissing the wrong cheeks, Nina. . . . Hugh! I went out of the room a while ago because I thought you were on the point of kissing

and it wouldn't be quite nice for me to catch you at it. But now I've determined I won't go until I've actually seen you kiss. Kiss, you horrid darlings.

[*Russ kisses his wife's hand, and then Nina throws her arms round him and kisses him fervently.*]

Anne. Now I'm going.

Russ. But we don't want you to go, do we, Nina?

Anne. Oh, yes, you do. *Au revoir.* I must run home and write to Alf and thank him for his brave, manly letter. Ta-ta. Ta-ta. [*She kisses Nina and shakes hands with Hugh.*] No. [*Putting on her gloves.*] I'll let myself out. [*At the door.*] And don't forget what I've told you. You're no better than a pair of infants. [*She kisses her hand to them and exit. The front door bangs.*]

Nina [*softly smiling*]. She's pretty wise—*Anne* is.

Russ. Let's be thankful for *Anne*. But there's something far more precious than *Anne*, and that's our passion for each other.

Nina. Can you explain it?

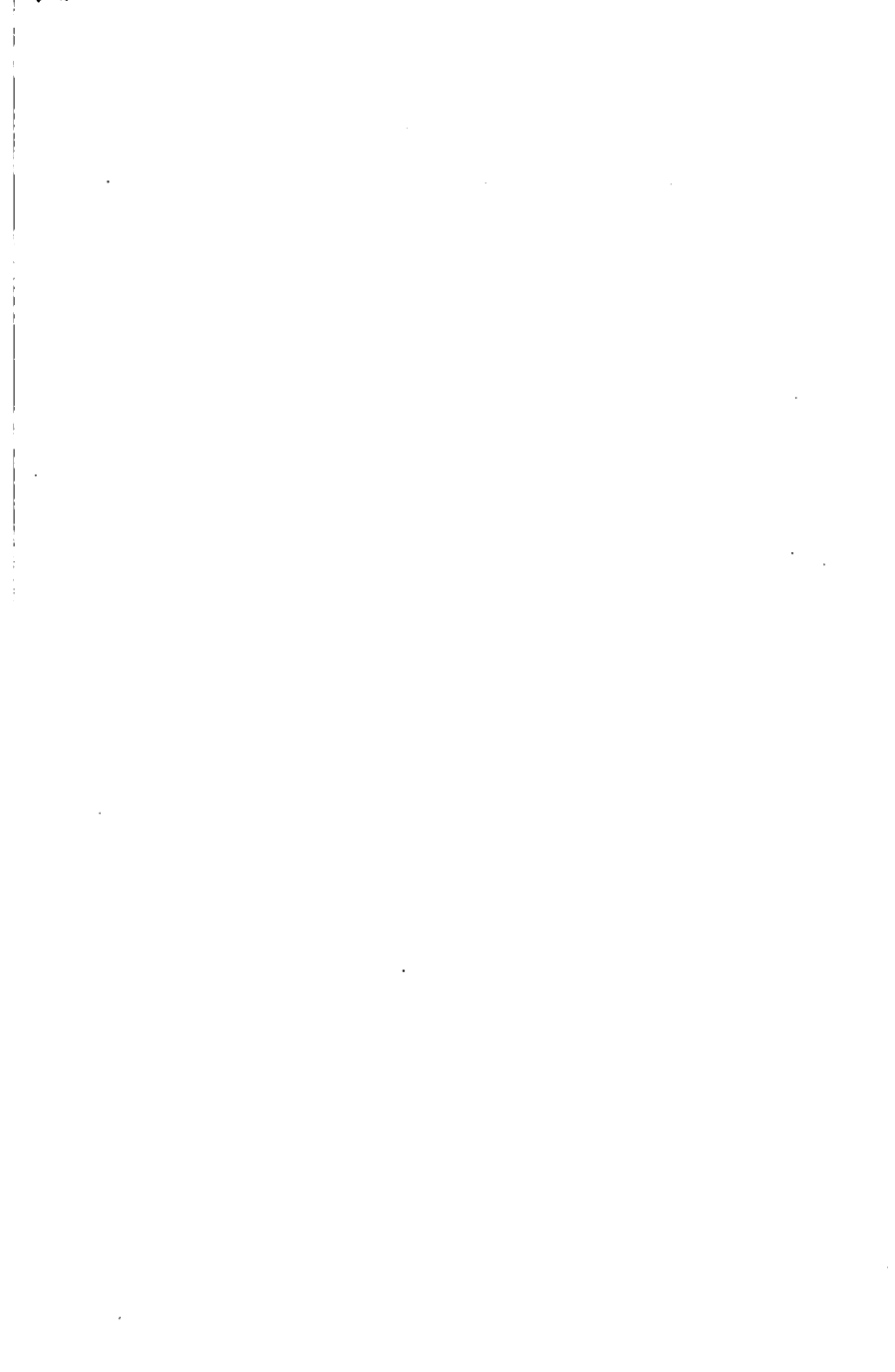
Russ. No, and I don't want to.

Nina [*dreamily*]. How strange life is! . . . We're all alone, all by ourselves in this great flat.

Russ. So we are! Come here, you imperfect woman. Ah! I remember telling you once that I wasn't in love with a bundle of perfections. And, by Jove, I wasn't. Come here, I say. [*Nina obeys.*]

He takes her in his arms.] Am I your master?
Am I? [*Nina nods.*] I'm not, then. I'm your
blooming slave, and you know it.

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